"I am the vampire for these times": Representations of Postmodernity in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*

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MA Thesis
August 2013

Tampereen yliopisto
Englantilainen filologia
Kieli-, käännös- ja kirjallisuustieteiden yksikkö

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Pro gradu -tutkielma, 65 sivua + lähdeluettelo
Elokuu 2013

Anne Ricen *The Vampire Chronicles* -kirjasarjaa voidaan pitää vampyyrinarratiivien uutena aaltona 1970-luvulta lähtien. Ricen romaaneissa vampyyrit itse nousivat pääosaan kirjojen päähenkilöinä, ja romaanit tietyssä määrin irtautuivat vanhemman vampyyrikirjallisuuden kaavoista. Tutkimukseni aiheena ovat Anne Ricen romaanisarjan kolme ensimmäistä teosta, *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) ja *The Queen of the Damned* (1988). Tutkielmani keskittyy siihen, kuinka kyseiset kirjat heijastavat sitä aikaa, jolloin ne on kirjoitettu. Pääteesini on, että romaanit kuvastavat hahmojensa ja tapahtumiensa kautta nk. postmodernia ajanjaksoa historiassa.

Tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys on uushistorismissa, joka mahdollistaa tekstin tarkastelemisen osana yhteiskunnassa kulloinkin hallitsevana toimivaa diskurssia tai ideologiaa. Yläkäsitteenä toimiva postmoderni ideologia sisältää lukuisia piirteitä, joista päällimmäisenä on nk. suurten kertomusten mureneminen, ja siitä seuraava nihilismi ja kyynisyys. Postmodernismiin sisältyy myös individualismin korostunut asema niin sosiaalisissa suhteissa kuin henkilökohtaisessa moraalissa, joka omalta osaltaan vaikuttaa sekä perhesuhteisiin että kapitalistisen yhteiskunnan voittokulkuun. Postmoderniin ideologiaan kuuluu myös olennaisesti identiteetin asema hauraana ja muuttuvana.

Tutkielman analyysiosuudessa käsittelen postmodernin ideologian piirteitä romaanien tapahtumien ja henkilöhahmojen näkökulmasta. Vampyyrit hahmoina edustavat vahvasti aiemmin mainittuja postmodernistisia piirteitä, sillä heidän päättymätön elämänsä antaa heille ainutlaatuisen näkökulman ihmiselämään ja sen suuriin kysymyksiin. Päähenkilöiden motiiveissa voidaan selvästi havaita henkinen taistelu jumalattomassa maailmassa, ja siitä seuraavat moraaliset ongelmat. Moraalisen jännitteen luo myös vampyyrien yhteiselo ihmisten maailmassa, jossa vampyyri on luonteeltaan muihin nähden peto. Vampyyrin hahmossa tulevat myös esille postmodernit identiteetit ja niiden hauraus, joka näkyy hahmojen pyrkimyksissä luoda itsensä uudelleen mm. konsumerismin avulla.

Romaanit luovat vampyyreista kuvan uuden, postmodernin ajan airuina, mutta kyseinen esitys pyrkii silti tiettyyn neutraaliuteen. Sekularismia, kapitalismia tai individualismia ei tuomita sisäsyntyisesti negatiivisina ilmiöinä. Postmodernin ideologian oikeutus jää lopulta lukijan päätettäväksi.

Avainsanat: Anne Rice, postmoderni, uushistorismi, ideologia, kapitalismi, valta, individualismi

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Vampire fiction as a genre within Gothic fiction has captured the imaginations of readers since at least the 1800s. Like the mythical creature itself, the fictional vampire has undergone several transformations throughout these years, and still in the 2000s it has seen a resurgence in different media. My study seeks to understand the role of Anne Rice's vampire fiction in the cultural climate of its creation in the 1970s and '80s.

Because of the saturation of vampire fiction, there also exists much material for a fruitful academic analysis. This is reflected, for example, in Nina Auerbach's *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, which seeks to show how each iteration of the vampire is an embodiment of the age they inhabit (1995, 1).

Matthew Gibson has also sought to show that vampires are not indeed insulated from their age. In *Dracula and the Eastern Question* Gibson has identified French and English vampire narratives as political commentary for the era after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (2006, 2).

There does not exist an overabundance of studies concerning Anne Rice's vampire literature and postmodernity. Catherine Belsey in "Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire" has examined Anne Rice's vampire as the embodiment of a "postmodern lover" (1994, 701). Candace R. Benefiel has also looked at Anne Rice's vampires as upsetting the norm of the nuclear family (2004), but the study does not explicitly tie the novels into a postmodern framework. However, as will be seen, the change in familial structures is a theme often voiced in the discourse on postmodernity.

What these studies show is that, as Ken Gelder puts it in *Reading the Vampire*, "[m]uch like capital for Marx, the vampire *circulates*" (1994, x). To get at the root of vampire fiction, one has to look at the text as interwoven with the world in which it was created. How do Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* novels embody the time they were created in? This is the research question that will guide my thesis. With this aim in mind, the thesis will look at the events, setting and most

importantly the immortal characters, and the ways in which they combine to produce an image of the age in question.

The hypothesis behind the research question is that Anne Rice's novels mainly reflect the postmodern era, which can be seen as starting after World War II, and continuing perhaps to this day. The themes often linked with postmodernity can be said to be, among others, the erosion of traditional values in favor of relativism, the disintegration of the nuclear family unit, cynicism, nihilism, and the rise of the individual in place of communities, and consequently also narcissism. A main force behind these symptoms is also the rising consumer culture, propelled by the expanding influence of capitalism. My thesis will argue that *The Vampire Chronicles* tackle all of these themes in one form or another, thus showing the novels to be an embodiment of postmodernity, and that postmodernity functions as an ideological system, wielding power in society.

My thesis will study Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* within a New Historical framework which takes into account the history embedded in all texts. New Historicism seeks to connect the work of art with the cultural and political movements of its time, meaning that the historical context is all-important when reading texts from this perspective. New Historicists describe "culture in action" (Veeser 1989, xi). Therefore, the theoretical framework utilized in the thesis will be integral in providing an answer to the research question.

One of the central terms in the theory of New Historicism is episteme, a term coined by Michel Foucault. As John Brannigan notes, "Foucault explains the concept . . . as similar to a period of history, but referring not to historical events but to the character and nature of 'knowledge' at a particular time" (1998, 15). Different concepts and ideas emerge at different times in history, and New Historicist analysis often focuses on them (Brannigan 1998, 15). This will be the case in my analysis as well, where the focus is on the episteme of postmodernity and its varied manifestations in society.

Moreover, integral in New Historicist theory are power relations that the analysis often seeks

to expose. 'Power' is a term also borrowed from Foucault, and it “refers usually to the relations of domination and resistance which saturate our social, political and cultural relations” (Brannigan 1998, 15). Though elusive, the concept of power is utilized in mapping out the effects of the postmodern episteme, as it functions similarly to an ideology. In the thesis I aim to first identify the episteme of postmodernity, and then analyze how power circulates within it and the texts.

Regarding the structure of my thesis, the theory section aims to explore the background of New Historicism and the terms associated with it such as power and episteme, and also to thoroughly define the aforementioned term of postmodernity. The analysis itself will focus on the themes of postmodernity in functioning as elements wielding power through the texts. As there is some overlap in what kinds of themes are evident in the novels, the analysis will move forward by examining the themes itself in separate sections, rather than focusing on the novels case-by-case.

The primary materials for my thesis come from Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*, and more specifically the first three novels in the series: *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and *The Queen of the Damned* (1988). The decision to limit the study into three novels was made in order to maintain a scope suitable for an MA thesis. These novels have as their antihero the vampire Lestat, who journeys through the centuries, roughly from the late 1700s to the late 1900s. *Interview with the Vampire* (from henceforth *IV*) is mainly an exploration of Lestat's relationships with vampires he has created, and their subsequent issues with the morality of being a vampire. The second novel in the series, *The Vampire Lestat* (*VL*) delves deeper into Lestat's origins, and lays out the foundations for the vampire mythology, which in turn is explored more thoroughly in *The Queen of the Damned* (*QT*).

2. New Historicism

New Historicism is a mode of literary criticism which puts at the forefront the operation of power through dominant ideological systems (Brannigan 1998, 6–7). I will utilize the theoretical

framework of New Historicism in my analysis, for I argue that postmodernity functions in society similarly to an ideology, wielding power through its manifestations. After delving into the underpinnings of New Historicism, it will be useful to write out the most important concepts in the theory. Of these I will explore both power and episteme which will be discussed in their own sections.

As John Brannigan notes, New Historicism is focused on how literary texts and forms of art are used as tools for the construction of power (1998, 57). An example of this is Stephen Orgel's *The Illusion of Power* (1975) in which he argues that the monarchy in the realm of Charles I fashions itself through theater, and it functions as a "device of power" (Brannigan 1998, 57). Similarly, Louis Montrose describes the professional theatre of Elizabethan London as an instrument of the nation-state for its aggrandizement and the supervision and governance of the monarchy's subjects (1996, 29).

New Historicism is then a theory which approaches texts not as unique, near-divine creations by their author, but rather as products of the time they were created in. As Richard Wilson points out, borrowing terms from Marshall McLuhan, the viewpoint of New Historicism is that in a 'global village' "power circulates in instantaneous images" (1992, 5). New Historicism, born in the age of such circular representations, was acutely aware of the "textuality of history" where images affect reality in such a way that reality itself, according to Baudrillard, has disappeared (Wilson 1992, 5). As he noted, "the image is not only a mirror or a counterpart of the real, but begins to contaminate reality and to model it . . . [and] it appropriates reality for its own ends . . ." (Baudrillard, quoted in Wilson 1992, 5). What can be said to be reality is constituted by texts, and the circulation of power is also propelled by these texts. This is the viewpoint from which New Historicism approaches texts – not in isolation, but as constituting something greater than themselves.

Similarly to what we have found in postmodernity, the circulation of representations also

affects identities which “are formulated and adapted through narratives and performances . . . and in response to and as a way of interacting with the prevailing historical conditions” (Brannigan 1998, 61). New Historicism appears fruitful in analyzing the postmodern condition manifesting itself in texts, for there seems to be a shared conception of identity formation, as will be seen in section 3.3.

New Historicism is also interested in the relationship between aesthetics and capitalism. Regarding the inclusion of social discourse texts such as official documents and newspapers in literary criticism, Greenblatt remarks in “Towards a Poetics of Culture” that aesthetic discourse is already “bound up with capitalist venture” (Greenblatt 1989, 11). Artists negotiate when working on their art to create currency for a meaningful and profitable exchange, both symbolically and metaphorically (Greenblatt 1989, 11). As H. Aram Veeser notes, “a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe” (1994, 2), thus revealing the influence of the capitalist system in the sphere of aesthetics, and in the theory of New Historicism itself.

New Historicism, as a form of criticism, is also marked by deep pessimism regarding subversive tendencies against the oppressive circulation of power. The circulation of power enables subjects to be tied to “ideological chains” (Wilson 1992, 7). As Greenblatt notes, there exists “massive power structures that determine social and psychic reality” (1984, 254). Subjectivity for the individual is never “unfettered” (Greenblatt 1984, 256). However, Gallagher and Greenblatt also note their interest in “counterhistories”, texts which seem to resist the “policing functions of their society, how they lay claim to special status, and how they contrive to move from one time period to another without losing all meaning” (2000, 16–17). There is consequently a dichotomy in the nature of New Historicism regarding the possibility of subversion against power.

The methods of analysis in New Historicism can be linked to Clifford Geertz's notion of thick description, found in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Texts are embedded in the cultures that they were created in, and they possess “culture's linked intentions” (Greenblatt & Gallagher

2000, 25). Cultural meanings with many layers can be inferred from textual fragments, and from anecdotes, for instance, “one can widen out into enormous complexities of social experience” (Geertz 1973, 19). The “lived life” that Geertz had come to scrutinize so well had been missing from literary analysis, and through thick description it was incorporated into New Historicism (Greenblatt and Gallagher 2000, 28). It also gave a push to analyze unfamiliar texts, “the marginal, odd, fragmentary, unexpected and crude”, which in turn would interact with works in the canon (Greenblatt and Gallagher, 2000, 28).

2.1 Power

The concept of power, originating with Foucault, is an important one for New Historicism. An outline of Foucault’s legacy for New Historicism is certainly warranted, but the scope of this excursion will be limited in this context.

According to Foucault, power operates everywhere in a structural and systematic way, passing through every relationship (Brannigan 1998, 48). Power is and comes from everywhere (Foucault 1984, 93). Power, according to Foucault, is not a straightforward concept. It is not a “group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state”, or a system of domination that one group exerts over another (1984, 92). It is rather that power can take the forms of state apparatus, formulation of the law and social hegemony (Foucault 1984, 92–3). Power is the name for a “complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1984, 93). Power is not a tool for any one individual or group (Brannigan 1998, 49). However, for both Stephen Orgel and Louis Montrose, who could be considered New Historicists, cultural forms were vehicles of power for the monarchies of Charles I and Elizabeth (Brannigan 1998, 58). Power can then be seen as co-opted for use by a particular institution.

Regarding the strategies of power, Foucault himself comments on the questions of who uses power and how power is used, noting the latter question to be the more important one. Sociological

studies and Marxism are able to point out “the bosses of industry”, the bourgeois or politicians as the ones wielding power, but this important problem cannot, according to Foucault, be resolved without answering the question of how power is used (1990, 103–4):

> . . . even if we reach the point of designating exactly all those people, all those “decision-makers,” we will still not really know why and how the decision was made, how it came to be accepted by everybody, and how is it that it hurts a particular category of person, etc.

Foucault stresses the importance of studying the networks, strategies and mechanisms in the use of power (1990, 104). In this sense, there is no denial of power being used by particular institutions or persons, as he himself notes that when studying the issue, one has to turn to “deputies, ministers, principal private secretaries, etc., etc.”, naming very specific people “in charge” (1990, 103). The focus of Foucault in the examination of power is clearly towards the strategies, but one can also detect the concrete origins of power.

Power as a term was borrowed into New Historicism, but Brannigan implies the terms 'power' and 'ideology' to be interchangeable, the difference being the legacy of Foucault on the naming convention in New Historicism (Brannigan 1998, 28). Raymond Williams, a cultural materialist, adds to the notion of ideology the term hegemony which emphasizes the complete saturation of ideology in the consciousness of society (1980, 37). Williams further notes that hegemony is “our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world”, and it “constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society” (1980, 38). The similarities to the notion of power structures as determining social reality (Greenblatt 1984, 254) in a New Historical framework are also evident in the workings of ideological hegemony. It could be therefore argued that both power and ideology refer to a concept denoting a wide system of beliefs and values in society.

Foucault also notes that power is not necessarily a negative concept, but that it “induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (1980, 119). In a Marxist framework, power relations are viewed as repression originating from the bourgeois (Branningan 1998, 49). In

Foucauldian terms, however, power “needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (Foucault 1980, 119). Power is not something to defy or overthrow, for “it is in fact the name of our own regressions, inhibitions, and incarcerations, it is our own self-fashioning and self-policing force” (Brannigan 1998, 52). Power might indeed be everywhere, but it is seen as a force that is not purely repressive, separating it somewhat from the negative connotations of ideology.

Foucault's conception of the functioning of power may not have been entirely clear even to himself (1990, 103), and my thesis will not delve too deeply into his thinking. Moreover, the concept of power has also been criticized as “elusively and literally undefinable, (Lentricchia 1989, 235), a conclusion I thoroughly agree with. However, it is useful to note the inheritance that Foucault left for the theorists of New Historicism. Power as a force that determines the social reality for a society – be it described as either power or ideological hegemony – is a worthy and productive focus of attention for a New Historical analysis examining the social conditions at the time of a text's creation.

2.2 Episteme

Episteme is another term New Historicism took from Michel Foucault and simplified to the extreme to signify a historical epoch. Each episteme is characterized by its own culture and mode of power (Brannigan 1998, 66). The argument of this thesis is that the episteme of postmodernity is the epoch following the Second World War, and that it wields its own form of power in society.

Foucault in *The Order of Things* describes episteme as something that shows how “our culture has made manifest the existence of order” (1989, xxi). Episteme creates the “basis of knowledge as we find it employed in grammar and philology, in natural history and biology, in the study of wealth and political economy” (1989, xxi). In effect, Foucault sought to employ the concept of episteme to explore the conditions that make knowledge possible. Epistemes have

changed with the epochs, but the change according to Foucault has not been a movement of progress, but rather a wholesale change in the basis of knowledge at given times (1989, xxii). Truth is dependent on the current episteme, and the shifts are sudden and unexplainable, which in turn makes "truth seem historically relative, even arbitrary" (Couzens Hoy 1986, 5). This view makes it impossible to tell how social change will come about (Couzens Hoy 1986, 5). Foucault's conception might therefore argue against the notion that shifts in epistemes have followed each other periodically, for instance, from a modern to a postmodern episteme. History is seen by Foucault as randomly producing and containing power and the accompanying effects (Brannigan 1998, 209). History is constituted in terms of discontinuous, accidental, unconnected series of events as the manifestation of power which has come to be criticized from a historical standpoint (McNay 1994, 24–6).

3. Postmodernity

In order to map out the postmodern episteme, it is important to understand the multiple facets which are affected by it. In the following chapters I will be looking into how the episteme of postmodernity is evident in society, somewhat concretely, through capitalism and the rise of consumerism, and, more abstractly, through the rejection of grand narratives and the varied consequences of this rejection. These consequences include changes in the structure of society, as well as the development of the individualized subject in terms of morals and identity. I will also examine postmodernity's origins as presented in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, albeit in a limited fashion suitable to my aim.

3.1 Postmodernity—Background

There is considerable overlap with what can be seen as the defining features of postmodernity. As

Andrew Milner notes, the term postmodernism is "as polysemic a sign as they come" (1994, 135), which makes it all the more difficult to pinpoint the defining characteristics of postmodernity.

Moreover, the problems of defining postmodernity also arise from the fact that it is seen by some to be an extension of the epoch before it, modernism. Daniel Bell in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* sees postmodernism as the "logical culmination of modernist intentions" (1979, 51). Similarly, Fredric Jameson notes that "[p]ostmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete . . ." (1991, ix). In this sense, it would not be out of place to argue then that postmodernity is merely the culmination of modernism.

It is then perhaps impossible to argue for a comprehensive definition of postmodernity, as there is no consensus on the matter. The disagreement becomes even more evident when realized that some might object to the fact that a thing or an epoch such as postmodernity even exists or that history can be dissected neatly into time periods with some overarching themes evident in their condition. As mentioned, Foucault also rejected the periodization and chronological succession seen in history (1989, 148).

Despite these obstacles, in the thesis I will argue that postmodernity is a dominant mode of thought for the post-war period especially in the West, and its effects can be seen in the economy, thought, and social relations – in nearly every facet of human existence. The definition for postmodernity is elusive and something that perhaps can not be universally agreed upon, but I will examine the themes of postmodernity that are most relevant in regards to the primary material of the thesis, Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*.

What perhaps can be said without much contention is that postmodernity can be dated to having its reign some time after the Second World War. As Milner notes, some date the actual beginning to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1994, 136). Similarly, Jean-François Lyotard according to Ashley Woodward points to "Auschwitz" as acting as the proper name for signifying "the untenability of any universal history, especially any teleological and progressive

history", showing the impossibility of incorporating the Holocaust into any such narrative (Woodward 2009, 125). There are others that point out to the radical transformations in society in the 1950s and 1960s (Milner 1994, 136). What can be said with certainty is that, as Milner notes, the theorists of postmodernity lived in an age that was decidedly "post-War", with the emphasis on the prefix (1994, 136). As Milner further points out, the "politico-economic" postmodernity dates from the 1940s with its distinct features (1994, 137):

> [A] prodigiously consumerist economy of affluence, initially confined to the United States, later dispersed throughout the West; the rapid collapse of the older European imperialisms and the development of new transnational cultural and economic forms; and a dynamically expansionist global hyper-militarism, very visibly represented in nuclear weapons systems. . .

The aforementioned developments together with the social transformations from the 1950s onwards make it possible to give postmodernity the denotation of "post-War", especially if one were to ascribe to postmodernity a date for its peak period. As we will see later, the origins of postmodernity, however, can be traced as far back as the 1800s.

The prehistory of postmodernism is mapped out by David Lyon in *Postmodernity* (1999). Evident in Western thought, Lyon makes note of the idea of "Providence", which refers to God's care of humankind after the creation of the world. As he further notes, "Providentialism denies any cyclical movement in history, inspiring future-oriented hope rather than resignation or pessimism" (1999, 7).

Through the Enlightenment, the idea of Providentialism later transformed into a secular variant, Progress. There was no certainty seen in God's laws, which in turn gave rise to modern scientific worldviews (Lyon 1999, 7). However, as Lyon notes, "the embryo of nihilism started to form in the womb of modernity", for the relativism of knowledge was a built-in assumption in the modern mind, lest it fall into the trap of dogmatic thought (1999, 8). There were numerous other developments that contributed to the emergence of the nihilistic mode of thought at the end of the

modern period. Of these developments Lyon mentions the Second World War and the crumbling of Colonialism as well as the damage to the environment following industrialization (1999, 8). The end result was “a massive questioning of received doctrines” (1999, 8). Lyon notes as examples the “expressive revolution” and the new social movements of the 1960s, the cynicism from Watergate and Vietnam, as well as the disintegration of communism (1999, 8–9). Marking these developments is the fact that they all took place after the Second World War.

The “grandiose dreams of westernization” were crumbling, and progress and reason were no longer seen as promising something better (Lyon 1999, 9). The term “postmodernity” was created to describe the results of this long development (Lyon 1999, 9). The effects that postmodernity has had on society ever since will be examined in the next section.

3.2 End of Grand Narratives—Nihilism and Cynicism

When one refers to postmodern culture, and especially the 'postmodern condition', critics often refer to Jean-François Lyotard and his ideas in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984). In it, he concludes (1984, xxiv): “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives”. One the most significant of these metanarratives is “. . . the Christian narrative of the redemption of original sin through love” (Lyotard, quoted in Woodward 2009, 123). The result of this incredulity is thus an end to the “unifying forces such as religion, nationhood, [and] universal ideals” (Williams 1998, 1). Nihilism can be inferred as arising from this rejection both in matters of moral values and questions of existence.

Postmodernity can then be described as inherently nihilistic, the nihilism deriving itself from the rejection of grand narratives, and the 'death of God' that Nietzsche famously exclaimed (Nietzsche 1974, 181). Nihilism is a concept that is closely intertwined with the postmodern condition when one considers the rejection of the grand narrative of Christianity. Referring to Dostoyevsky's insight, Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller note that “if God does not exist, everything is

permitted" is a refrain prevalent in the "micro-discourse" of nihilism (1991, 45).

As Fehér and Heller further note, with God removed as the vouchsafer of moral norms, moral decisions are in the "nihilism narrative" ultimately decisions between the arguments of two moral agents, and no true decision can be reached (1991, 47). In this proposition is manifested most clearly the place that humans now inhabit as the arbiters of moral issues in place of God.

Perhaps nowhere is the philosophy of nihilism more clearly outlined than in Nietzsche. Ashley Woodward notes that Nietzsche can be seen as laying the groundwork and setting the context for postmodern theories of nihilism (Woodward 2009, 29). According to Nietzsche, religious nihilism originates in the interpretation of the world according to a Christian-moral framework (Woodward 2009, 32). Nietzsche contends that this interpretation of the world is nihilistic in itself, for the values it posits are "outside of life and in *opposition* to life" (Woodward 2009, 34). Nietzsche's philosophy as underlying Lyotard's formulations of postmodernity is seen in the positions of God and metanarratives. As Ashley Woodward notes about Lyotard, both concepts – God and metanarratives – share the significance in being transcendent categories of value, conferring meaning and value on human life, thus evidencing the "homology between Nietzsche's story of nihilism and the delegitimation of metanarratives" (2009, 124). In this respect, the connection between Nietzsche's philosophy and the theories of postmodernity becomes evident.

Nietzsche's answer to the crisis in Western thought is to advocate "experimentation and the active creation of values by strong individuals" as a means of filling the void that the Christian interpretation has left, and the concept of the Übermensch (or Superman, Overman) is one through which this new valuation is done (Woodward 2009, 40). Nietzsche's propositions regarding nihilism are thus intertwined with a strand of individualism in moral matters, more thoroughly explored in section 3.5 regarding individual morality in the postmodern epoch.

Nihilism can be seen as the starting point from which an extreme form of individuality in moral matters branches out, but also intertwined with the aforementioned issues is *cynicism* that can

be seen as preceding the loss of faith in a universal set of values. As Timothy Bewes notes in his work *Cynicism and Postmodernity* (1997, 26):

> . . . postmodernism is a debased cultural form, a monstrous hybrid aesthetic, a decadent self-indulgent apoliticism and an élitist, ironical nihilism. Postmodernism is above all . . . cynically *destructive*, the perpetrator of a sinister assault on cognitive, aesthetic and moral certainties.

The postmodern cynic is thus a perpetrator, questioning certainties such as the redemption or judgment inherent in Christianity. As such, this form of cynicism comes very close to the above mentioned nihilism, and the prevalence of cynicism in the postmodern individual can be traced back to it. According to Andreas Huyssen, Peter Sloterdijk in *Critique of Cynical Reason* has examined cynicism as "a central feature of the postmodern condition in the 1970s and 1980s", linking it to the "pervasive sense of political disillusionment in the wake of the 1960s and the pained feeling of a lack of political and social alternatives in Western societies" (2001, xi). There can thus be seen a link between cynicism and the fall of metanarratives by nihilistic impulses. The two concepts of nihilism and cynicism are closely intertwined, but, in order to make a distinction between them, it could be argued that cynicism is the precursor to nihilism – cynicism is the doubting assault which ultimately leads to nihilism.

In Peter Sloterdijk's definition of a cynic, issues of individuality and immorality are also present, as was the case with nihilism. As Sloterdijk mentions, "fertile ground for cynicism in modernity is to be found not only in urban culture but also in the courtly sphere" (1984, 191). As he further remarks, regarding these environments (1984, 191):

> From the very bottom, the declassed, urban intelligentsia, and from the top, the height of conscious statesmanship, serious thinking is invaded by signals attesting to a radical ironization of ethics and of social convention. It is as if the general laws were only meant for the stupid, while those in the know smile with fatal cleverness.

Cynicism in Sloterdijk's formulation sheds light on the cynic who is through his disposition

transgressing moral boundaries, a figure reminiscent of an individual in postmodernity with a set of values crafted outside of the influence of one's community (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 4), examined further in section 3.5. As will be later discovered, such a figure of a transgressing cynic is one the defining characteristics of the vampire as a character in Anne Rice's novels. Furthermore, the vampires' embrace of cynicism is underlined in *The Vampire Chronicles*, as their depictions, contrary to the Gothic image of the vampire concentrate on an urban landscape and vampires at the top of society. This echoes Sloterdijk's division of people according to their spheres of influence.

3.3 Identity and the Place of the Individual

The issue of identity has two strands in postmodern thought. As Fredric Jameson points out, people are unable to locate and situate themselves in the postmodern hyperspace, “the great global multinational and decentered communicational network” (1991, 44). This obviously calls into question the notion of the possibilities for individual subjects in a postmodern world. Jameson further implies that the autonomous subject has vanished (1991, 77). As Douglas Kellner further notes in his article “Constructing postmodern identities”, within the recent discourse of postmodernity there is a claim that in the acceleration of the effects of postmodern society, identities become increasingly unstable and fragile, and that the notion of identity itself is an illusion, a myth (1992, 143).

However, Iain Chambers remarks that new possibilities for the individual open up to construct an identity through fashion and consumer goods. Through fashion, popular music and dance, males and females alike can assume new roles (1990, 54). Mike Featherstone also remarks that “the new heroes of consumer culture” can display their individuality through choosing from an assortment of “clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions” that together form a lifestyle (2007, 84).

Identity can also be seen as produced by the medium of popular culture and the roles it

creates. Kellner discusses the formation of identity, and notes that instead of reading a typically postmodern text such as *Miami Vice* one-dimensionally, there is a possibility for a reading that provides insights on how identity, while fragile and fragmented, is also reconstructed and constructed "through the incorporation of subject positions offered for emulation by popular culture" (1992, 149). Kellner argues that popular culture in general produces role models for subjects to identify with, and it both valorizes and denigrates different forms of behavior (1992, 150). What *Miami Vice* offers is an identification with the affluent and up-scale and the "fast, mobile lifestyle focusing on exciting consumerist leisure" (1992, 150–1). However, the multiple identity positions for the main characters are by no means lasting (1992, 151), which can be seen as characteristic for postmodernity in the varied identities offered through changing lifestyles.

In 1976 Richard Sennett noted that electronic communication and especially the television functions as enabling the cultural impulse to withdraw from social interaction. Watching TV is ultimately an intimate, personal experience (1976, 282–3). Moreover, Sennett claimed that electronic media fulfills the cultural impulse of feeling "more as a person", and functions as "part of the arsenal of combat between social experience and personal experience (1976, 282–3). Mass media "intensify the patterns of crowd silence . . . [and] intensify the idea of a disembodied spectator, a passive witness" (1976, 283). Mass media have undoubtedly become ubiquitous during the 20th century, and it is therefore easy to see the effect they have had as a catalyst for the individualist strand in the formation of identities in postmodernity.

It is worth noting that identities in postmodernity are constructed "*against* dominant conventions and morality", making the fluid, unstable identities threatening from a moral standpoint (Kellner 1992, 156). This is evocative of the backlash described in conjunction with changes in the postmodern social sphere, described in 3.8. Taken altogether, the identity formation of postmodernity is seen as a threat to an existing order, and an echo of this is ringing in Anne Rice's novels, especially when combined with the image of the consumer as the hedonist.

It is then justified to say that the individual is not necessarily lost or vanished in the postmodern world, and the acceleration of consumer culture might even make this "lifestyle-building" more rampant than it ever has been, however fleeting those identities constructed in the process may be. Already in 1965 the United States and Western Europe could be classified as mass-consumption societies (Bell 1999, 460), increasing the possibility for identity creation through consumption. James E. Burroughs and Aric Rindfleisch note of studies concerning the "explosion of advertising messages (Belk and Pollay 1986), materialistic themes (Friedman 1985), and consumption desires (Halberstam 1993)" as evidence of "the evolution of consumption as a culturally accepted means of seeking success, happiness, and the populist notion of the good life" (2002, 348). Capitalism and its related phenomena affecting identity construction will be examined further in the following section.

3.4 Postmodernity and Capitalism

Capitalism is responsible for producing a commodity culture of signs intended for identity construction, and, furthermore, television and other media can be seen to accelerate these effects by promoting the lifestyle of the consumer with a barrage of advertising. As Kellner notes, advertising provides "models of identity" (1992, 158). The development of the postmodern condition and its multiple facets go hand in hand with the development of the capitalist system.

It is worth noting the possible effect of the rejection of the grand narrative of Christianity that perhaps contributed to global capitalism, and thus also to the aforementioned commodification of society. As Daniel Bell remarks in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, "the Catholic moral principle of the just price" and "the Puritan emphasis on frugality" once served as boundaries for capitalism. Along with the proliferation of technology and the diminishing of the religious impulses, Bell argues that capitalism lost the limits that were holding it back from exponential growth (1979, xx). Bell notes on the Protestant ethic and the Puritan temper (1979, 55): "[They]

were codes that emphasized work, sobriety, frugality, sexual restraint, and a forbidding attitude toward life. They defined the nature of moral conduct and social respectability". With the restraints of these codes gone, it is easier to understand how the rise of capitalism connects with postmodernity. The developments in the circuit of capital necessarily affect the subject, and produce symptoms of the postmodern age in connection with the fall of grand narratives.

Members of a consumption community find themselves defined through their material possessions, the development enforced by the pervasiveness of advertising (Bell 1979, 68). "A consumption economy, one might say, finds its reality in appearances" (Bell 1979, 68). It is in this regard that capitalism, as an enabler to this new mode of culture, finds its connection to identity formation and its processes. As Douglas Kellner notes when discussing the state of identity in postmodern subjects (1992, 172):

> Thus it seems that it is capital itself which is the demiurge of allegedly postmodern fragmentation, dispersal of identity, change and mobility. Rather than postmodernity constituting a break with capital and political economy, as Baudrillard and others would have it, wherever one observes phenomena of postmodern culture one can detect the logic of capital behind them.

The rise of consumer culture and capitalism is thus a major creative force in producing the symptoms of postmodernity.

3.5 Individual Morals

So far we have observed that there is a current of individualism against dominant conventions running though the episteme of postmodernity, and that there is in society evident a cynical disposition, resulting in the rejection of grand narratives and thus nihilism. The compounded effects of these developments can also be seen as resulting in individualized morality.

Rejecting the meta- or grand narrative of Christianity could be considered liberating from a moral perspective, as the certainty of divine judgment is removed, and Christianity can no longer

function as something to be utilized as an object of measurement in value judgments. Consequently, what one is left with is uncertainty regarding moral choices, and that is a major issue that marks the moral agent in the postmodern era.

The implications to morality arising from the postmodern condition become evident, when one examines the contemporary era of 'little narratives', as opposed to grand narratives. As a result of these 'little narratives', "[c]ontemporary Western discourse is characteristically unstable, fragmented, dispersed – not a *world-view* at all" (Bennett & Royle 2004, 251). Grand narratives functioned as models explaining the world around the subject. Be it implicitly good or bad, the change into these little narratives indicates change from premodern thinking where authority was centralized often in the church, and the change entails different things. As the belief in grand narratives is utterly decimated in the postmodern culture, one is left with a profound sense of confusion in matters of morality. There is no consensus on values and norms (Bauman 1994, 1). Zygmunt Bauman stresses the need for moral knowledge in the "ethical crisis of postmodernity" (1994, 16–7). In the actions of individuals, the focus is turned inwards from the village community, or the rules of social estate and classes (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 4). Moreover, in the face of complexity in the social sphere, individuals are not able to make properly founded decisions "by considering interests, morality and consequences" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 4). It can then be argued that the rejection of grand narratives almost necessarily leads to pronounced individuality in morality. In a postmodern setting where God is presumed dead, one can only look inwards when plotting the moral course of his or her life.

Zygmunt Bauman notes that moral rules in the age of postmodernity are authored and promoted on a "supra-individual level" (1992, xxii). The change from modernity to postmodernity, according to Bauman, has been that societies have relinquished their role in promoting cultural uniformity, and also that they no longer have the role of "spokesmen of universal reason" (1992, xxii). The end result from this for the individual is a confusion and lack of clarity regarding moral

choices. The individual becomes the one responsible in this confusion (Bauman 1992, xxii): “In a cacophony of moral voices, none of which is likely to silence the others, the individuals are thrown back on their own subjectivity as the only ultimate ethical authority”. From a conservative viewpoint that emphasizes the community over the individual, postmodernity can then be seen as threatening or detrimental with regard to moral values.

Bauman further notes that in this postmodern setting the universal reason promoted by societies was never complemented by a God. The result then has been the privatization of morality (1992, xxiii): “[E]thics has become a matter of individual discretion, risk-taking, chronic uncertainty and never-placated qualms”. In essence, in a Nietzschean fashion, man has risen above God, the result being a moral agent fashioning his or her own choices amid the ambiguity and confusion. The cause for the formation of this new moral agent can be thus traced back to the aforementioned rejection of grand narratives.

3.6 Nietzsche and Postmodernity

Nietzsche's effect on the philosophical underpinnings of postmodernity cannot be understated, and they also become relevant in the analysis of *The Vampire Chronicles*. In addition to the vampire's metaphorical ascendance to God's throne, utilizing Nietzsche's thematic, the essence of the vampire is in him being a predator among men, placing them above their prey and looking down at them with detachment. Regarding the essence of a predator, Nietzsche points out the paralogism – the fallacious argument – in separating a force from its effects or manifestations. As Gilles Deleuze understands it, the premise of the paralogism is in the assumption that “the bird of prey is able to not manifest its force, that it can hold back from its effects and separate itself from what it can do: it is evil because it does not hold itself back” (Deleuze 1983, 123). As Deleuze further points out, this paralogism is the “foundation of the paralogism of *ressentiment*”, leading to a triumph of reactive forces (1983, 123), as opposed to the active forces through which the Nietzschean man is able to

create values for himself outside a Christian framework of morality. As will be seen in the analysis, the paralogism constitutes one of the central themes of the novels, as the vampires' internal conflict revolves around the acceptance of being irreversibly what they are. In the characters there is also present an ever growing cynicism leading to the discarding of religious myths that bind them to morality.

In the distinction of forces between the active and reactive, the former is characterized by appropriation, possession, subjugation and domination (Deleuze 1983, 42). For Nietzsche, there is a hierarchy between these forces, and it is the reactive ones which ultimately help reverse the natural order and make the slave the master, thus making the weak conquer the earth (Deleuze 1983, 60–1). In this process the Church is seen as being one of the propagators of the reactive forces (Deleuze 1983, 61). Deleuze shows through passages from *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, that according to Nietzsche, in history the reactive forces of the State and the Church produce “herds” of people who consist of “docile, sickly, mediocre” humans instead of sovereign individuals (Deleuze 1983, 138).

As Schacht also underlines through passages from *The Will to Power*, in Nietzsche's philosophy “human beings generally . . . fall into one or the other of two radically different and widely disparate groups, one very numerous and occupying the 'human lowlands,' and the other, 'very small in number,' constituting 'a *higher, brighter* humanity' standing far 'above' the rest” (Schacht 1985, 329). This higher type of people is exemplified by Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* (Schacht 1985, 330). The Übermensch (or Overman) is set apart from the human herd by “powerful drives, robust health, exceptional strength and overflowing vitality (Schacht 1985, 331). In Nietzsche's formulation of the Overman there is also manifest the aforementioned elevation above other humans (Nietzsche 1967, 59–60, cf. Schacht 1985, 333):

> [T]he *sovereign individual* is, like only to himself, liberated again from the morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral . . . , who has his own independent, protracted will. . . . [H]ow should he not be aware of [how] his . . . mastery over himself also necessarily gives

> him mastery over circumstances, over nature, and over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures?

The development of the supramoral individual is intrinsically tied to the death of God and the resulting relativism in morality. As Arthur C. Danto notes, in the death of God there was a liberation for Nietzsche, “the idea that the world is ours to make, not discover, and that we are the center and the lawgiver of it all” (1980, 193). The death of God can be treated as “a call to creativity, to new structures and to fresh ideals, in the light of which we might make ourselves over in an image of our own” (1980, 194). In this confusion amidst moral relativity, Nietzsche puts forth the Overman as “the unitary human goal” (1980, 196), acting as the “'revaluer of values'” (Dovi & Mara 1995, 9). In Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*, the vampires embody the character of the Overman, the active man who transcends history both literally and figuratively, and discards the moral codes of religion and ordinary people.

It is also worth noting that, as Nietzsche noted, “art represents the highest task and the truly metaphysical activity of this life” (Nietzsche, quoted in Schacht 1985, 478). As Richard Schacht further points out, Nietzsche believed that the early Greeks without the Judeo-Christian belief system to sustain them in the face of the absurdity of existence were still “the most vigorous, creative, life-affirming people the world has known” (1985, 480–1). The answer to the existential questions was to be found, according to Nietzsche, in their art (Schacht 1985, 481). As he further notes, citing Nietzsche from *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche, quoted in Schacht 1985, 481):

> Here, where the danger to [the] will is greatest, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live.

Furthermore, the Overman can be seen as the “symbol of human life raised to the level of art” in its creativity that is above other humans (Schacht 1985, 482).

Art then occupies an essential position in Nietzsche's philosophy in regard to the Overman,

which also links it to the parts of his philosophy that were ahead of its time as manifestations of what came to be postmodern concerns. Nietzsche's formulation of the Overman as the revaluer of values closely resembles the supramoral individual in an age of secularism and moral relativism. It can be seen that the postmodern concerns of individuality in rising above the herd and at the same time rejecting the grand narrative of Christianity are intimately tied into Nietzsche's philosophical framework. It is to be noted also that, as David Lyon remarks, Nietzsche's conception of nihilism corresponds to the "anchorless sense of reality" present in postmodernity, further marking him a "postmodern *avant la lettre*" (1999, 11), and thus vital in the analysis of the postmodern episteme.

3.7 Narcissism

So far we have concluded that the postmodern condition has left the subject without any gods, and that the person is locked in a struggle of individualization both in terms of morality and identity. It can be argued that these two combined produce narcissism as the symptom of the postmodern age. As David Michael Levin notes (1988, 406):

> With the 'death of God', what happens to our cultural mirror for the Self? If we counted on the authority of God's light to reflect back to us our ideals of for selfhood, the 'death of God' would seem to leave us without any higher ideal by reference to which we might steer the course of our self-development.

As he consequently argues, "the 'death of God' spells the dominance of 'narcissism' as cultural paradigm for the Self's development" (1988, 406). Thus, a sense of wariness can be detected in the discourse on the aforementioned process of individualization.

According to Richard Sennett, the turn from the public domain into intimate feelings has also led to the aforementioned narcissism as a symptom of the times (Sennett 1976, 8). Narcissism obscures the perception of persons or events, so that they are seen in terms of what they mean to the individual. Narcissism thus acts as both a "voracious absorption in self needs and the block to their

fulfillment" (Sennett 1976, 8). Narcissism paradoxically makes it impossible for an individual to find gratification for himself (Sennett 1976, 8).

Christopher Lasch in 1978 discussed narcissism in the context of fading narratives that once gave history a "rational direction" (1978, xiii). In his view there was a perceived failure in the efforts of liberalism, the natural sciences, economic theory or the humanities in showing a course for the direction of history, resulting in despair (1978, xiii–xiv). Lasch further argued that in bureaucracy the "inadequacy of solutions dictated from above now forces people to invent solutions from below" (1978, xv). In essence, the logic of individualism brought to its conclusion and "the poverty of the prevailing ideologies" in their attempts to master reality has produced the narcissist (Lasch 1978, xvi–xvii). The narcissist is "[l]iberated from the superstitions of the past", and acts in accordance with the values of extreme acquisitiveness in search of immediate gratification (Lasch 1978, xvi). The narcissist does not believe that rules and regulations apply to him, and in social and sexual attitudes he is tolerant and permissive, emancipated from "ancient taboos" (Lasch 1978, xvi). In Lasch's formulation, it becomes clear that "devaluation of the past" and the resulting narcissism is seen as a cultural crisis, and consequently a threat to the conservative values that Lasch espoused (1978, xviii).

Narcissism is also understood to be a symptom of materialism run rampant. Mike Featherstone has noted of the new petite bourgeoisie that they are attracted to the "most naive aristocratic qualities (style, distinction, refinement) in the pursuit of expressive and liberated lifestyles" (2007, 88) through consumerism. He refers to the "new narcissism" in which a fascination with "identity, presentation and appearance makes "the new petit bourgeois a 'natural' consumer" (2007, 88–9). Because the body is treated "as a sign for others and not as an instrument" (Featherstone 2007, 88), capitalism produces possibilities for lifestyle choices which skew towards narcissism. Similarly to what can be seen in regard to identity construction through commodity culture, narcissism is linked to the acceleration of the effects of capitalism where the products in a

commodity culture thoroughly define the individual to a large and harmful extent.

Narcissism can be seen as an issue arising from the development of the individual that is seen as being in greater control of both his morals and identity formation, and there is a sensed danger in the shift away from the communal values that preceded the narcissistic tendencies, evident in the discourse on postmodern society. Nevertheless, it could be also argued that to conclude individualism as invariably leading to narcissism is a flawed assessment. The fear of a society in the postmodern epoch controlled by the narcissistic mode of thought can perhaps be understood from a conservative viewpoint, but not to be taken as a knee-jerk reaction to a perceived threat of narcissism that greater individualism supposedly enables. As John Meyer notes (1986, 219): “If we ignore this theme of the primordial individual self or treat it as an irrational or perverse reaction, accusing it of being narcissistic or the explosion of an overburdened unconscious, we fail to understand that it is a legitimated and authorized myth of the Western system as a whole”. The transformation from a collective society into a collection of individuals is not in itself harmful, for there is now greater freedom to break from the chains that might have fettered a person into a particular place in society, emphasizing the drive towards more mobility in society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 3). Yet it is still worth noting the sensed threat that conservatives manage to voice in the discourse, for the tension it manifests can be considered a facet of the episteme of postmodernity.

3.8 Social Relationships and Postmodernity

Springing forth from the philosophy of the postmodern condition, there were other visible changes in the structure of Western society, as well, the clearest example of which was perhaps the change in familial structures. David Elkind discusses the “second sexual revolution” in his article “The Family in the Postmodern World” (1995):

> It was ushered in partly by the introduction of new contraceptive methods (the pill), partly by the sexual experimentation that took place during World War II both at home and abroad, and partly by the decline in the moral authority of the government after the Vietnam War and Watergate. In effect, the second sexual revolution amounted to the social acceptance of premarital sex. This acceptance effectively destroyed the sentiment of romantic love inasmuch as now young people could have a succession of sexual partners before marriage.

As he further argues, the destruction of romantic love – the belief in perfect romantic life partners for each individual – transforms the end result of a relationship from a nuclear family to a postmodern, permeable family, which carries with it a new sentiment of consensual love. This necessitated a change in the characteristic, "old" family values. The value of this new, permeable family was according to Elkind "that of autonomy, the importance of individual choice and personal life journey" (1995).

The process of individualization has also contributed to the falling prominence of the family as the main social unit. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim note that in a welfare state, the entitlements and rights are geared towards the needs of the individual rather than the family unit, thus functioning against family cohesion. Many benefits presuppose employment, which in turn presupposes education and thus the willingness to be mobile in a society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 3).

In the postmodern age, the traditional nuclear family has ceased to exist as the end-all or the defining mode of living for the postmodern individual. As Elkind notes, possible new structures in addition to the nuclear family include "two-parent working families, single-parent families, adoptive families, remarried families, as well as gay and lesbian parent families" (1995). These new structures underline the fact that the individual is no longer chained by tradition.

Such change described in society has, not surprisingly, come under criticism from conservative voices as attacks against tradition. Christopher Lasch, among others, has described the apparent direction of the institute of marriage as being a kind of a companionship between two individuals, in which the old social roles of 'father', 'mother' or 'husband' do "violence to one's own needs and feelings", and should thus be discarded in favor of something more flexible. Marriage

therapists, according to Lasch, condemn the idea of traditional romantic love which produces expectations that no marriage can realistically be expected to meet, such as monogamy. The "marriage experts insist that adultery should not necessarily be considered a breach of faith", and the choice should be left to the couple (Lasch 1979, 138).

Moreover, Lasch claims that after "the heyday of the bourgeois family", the parents, because of various reasons, have become distant in the life of the children (1979, 182). Lasch also argues that sexual liberation in the form of masturbation, homosexuality and the "celebration of oral sex" spring forth from the "prevailing fear of heterosexual passion" (1979, 183). The end result of this is "hypochondria", "melancholy", "suicidal self-hatred" and "chronic mild depression, the dominant mood of the times" (1979, 183). Lasch sees the nuclear family under threat, and the consequences of the attack as rather serious.

In similarly worried and disapproving tones Daniel Bell remarks about the 'flaunting of perversion' in the 1960s (1979, 122):

> In such films as Andy Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls* and the Swedish *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, in such plays as *Futz* and *Ché*, one found an obsessive preoccupation with homosexuality, transvestism, buggery, and, most pervasive of all, publicly displayed oral-genital intercourse. What this obsession seemed to represent was a flight from heterosexual life, perhaps in response to the release of aggressive female sexuality which was becoming evident at the end of the decade.

Both Lasch and Bell see the sexual liberation of the 1960s as something definitely outside the norm, and moreover as something producing harmful effects. However, as was noted in section 3.8, David Elkind has cited the sexual revolution of the 1960s as a positive phenomenon which has ultimately produced more autonomy for individual subjects (1995).

Richard Sennett talks at length about the decay of the public domain as opposed to private. The American society, according to Sennett places value on individual experience, and this might lead to measuring "all social life in terms of personal feeling" (1976, 5). This development has also led to physical acts of love to being redefined with terms of sexuality, as opposed to eroticism.

Whereas “eroticism involved social relationships, sexuality involves personal identity” (Sennett 1976, 7). Sexuality is thought to be a way to define who we are, to find ourselves, leading ultimately away from social relationships (Sennett 1976, 7).

Sennett, Lasch and Bell focus their attentions on behavior that does not fit the conservative viewpoint that they espouse. In my opinion, it need not be said that such attitudes can be seen as outdated and even morally reprehensible, but nevertheless they serve to highlight the perpetual inherent tension caused by social change in the postwar era. Such change in familial structures and the relationships between people can ultimately be traced back to the individualization process, which in turn is propelled by capitalism, commodity culture and the rejection of the grand narrative of Christianity. This enables the developments in societal structures to be seen in connection with postmodernity, further elucidating its effect on the sphere of living after the Second World War.

4. Analysis

The analysis in the following sections will consist of exploring the aforementioned themes of postmodernity evident in *The Vampire Chronicles*.

4.1 Consumer Capitalism and Identity Construction

In *The Vampire Chronicles*, the circuit of capital is an essential part of vampiric life. In the novels, descriptions of vampires acquiring wealth from their victims abound, and the vampire could often be described as a predatory capitalist. Symbols of status and wealth are often also associated with the vampire, and as will be shown, such manifestations of consumerism can be seen as integral in the construction of their identities.

The issue of identity formation intertwined with a commodity culture is explored in *Interview with the Vampire* through the character of Claudia. Due to the fact that Lestat had made

Claudia into a vampire while she was still a child, the result is that Claudia is forever trapped in a child's body, while her mind is still maturing as if she were still a mortal. This leads to tension in the relationship between Claudia, Lestat and Louis, for Claudia cannot accept this outcome. Things eventually come to a head, and Claudia conspires to kill Lestat.

After returning to Paris from Central Europe, Louis at Claudia's insistence purchases a pricey hotel suite as their home (*IV* 221)*:* "The hotel, she said, quietly afforded us complete freedom, our nocturnal habits going unnoticed in the continual press of European tourists, our rooms immaculately maintained by an anonymous staff, while the immense price we paid guaranteed our privacy and security". There is however an ulterior motive in Claudia's consumption, which Louis notices (*IV* 221): "There was a feverish purpose to her buying".

Claudia seems to be obsessed with the material pleasures in the hotel room, and there is indeed a purpose in the buying, evidencing a desire for self-expression through it (*IV* 221):

> 'This is my world,' she explained to me as she sat in a small velvet chair before the open balcony . . . 'I must have it as I like,' she said, as if speaking to herself. And so it was as she liked, stunning wallpaper of rose and gold, an abundance of damask and velvet furniture, embroidered pillows and silk trappings for the fourposter bed. Dozens of roses appeared daily for the marble mantels and the inlaid tables, crowding the curtained alcove of her dressing room, reflected endlessly in tilted mirrors.

Moreover, the demeanor of Claudia in this quest for material possessions is no longer that of a child, showing the transformative effect of her acquisitiveness. As Louis remarks (*IV* 223):

> Something was collecting in Claudia, revealing itself slowly to the most unwilling witness in the world. She had a new passion for rings and bracelets children did not wear. Her jaunty, straight-backed walk was not a child's, and often she entered small boutiques ahead of me and pointed a commanding finger at the perfume or the gloves she would then pay for herself.

Claudia's consumption of material possessions mirrors the process of constructing a new identity in place of the old one marked out by the child's body she is forced to inhabit (*IV* 224): "'A beautiful child,' [Claudia] said glancing up at me. 'Is that what you still think I am?'". The identity

construction is not only limited to the commodity signs that mark her out as an adult, but the process of participating in the capitalist system as an autonomous subject plays a role in this development. It is not enough that Louis should buy the materials for the identity construction process (*IV* 221): ". . . I could see that she became impatient ordering everything through me; it was wearing for her". Claudia herself points out the things she wants to have after assertively walking into a store, and pays for the things herself. Claudia does not need to go through Louis anymore, and the transformation in this regard induces fear in Louis (*IV* 223).

Lestat also tries to fashion for Claudia an identity through commodity signs (*IV* 110*):*

> An endless train of dressmakers and shoemakers and tailors came to our flat to outfit Claudia in the best of childen's fashions, so that she was always a vision, not just of child beauty, with her curling lashes and her glorious yellow hair, but of the taste of finely trimmed bonnets and tiny lace gloves, flaring velvet coats and capes, and sheer white puffed-sleeve gowns with gleaming blue sashes. Lestat played with her as if she were a magnificent doll. . . .

The identity construction is a matter of constructing appearances, as was the case with Claudia's own project. Bonnets, gloves and coats create the veneer of an identity, while behind it exists merely a lifeless doll without any authenticity. Lestat makes a remark about the "great figure [Lestat, Claudia and Louis] cut" (*IV* 110) at the opera or the theater, drawing further notice to the artificiality of the vampire trio's identities. A figure tells nothing about the inherent nature of the object itself, but is rather only an outline, an appearance without the content of character in this case. The new identities are not considered fixed or unalterable, but rather as styles, subject to change.

The capitalist system for vampires not only is a tool for the construction of identities, but also an enabler for their very being, allowing them to function freely as the monsters they are depicted as being. Capitalist processes have deep roots in the formation of the subject, and they are not only limited to the role that commodities play in the process. It should be noted how Claudia's transformation from a mortal child as the victim to a perpetrator in the form of a vampire is

intimately tied to the capitalist system. Not only does Claudia form an identity as an adult with the help of consumerist enterprise, but this in turn enables Claudia to prowl the city on her own in search of people to feast on. Not to mention the fact that Louis and Claudia both use their wealth to continue living at the heart of Paris undetected, enabling their "lifestyle" of vampirism.

The inherent acquisitiveness of vampires is noted in *The Queen of the Damned* in the form of one of the central characters in the novel, Maharet. The vampire is compared to a witch who can "attract and manipulate supernatural forces to ensure the family's steady accumulation of wealth and other success in human affairs" (*QT* 155). Furthermore, vampires in general are described as "a rather materialistic lot", who leave behind entire households "complete with furnishings, clothing and even coffins" (*QT* 159). As embodying the manipulation of the forces of capitalism along with their desire for blood, vampires are painted as menacing figures. The vampires' acquisitiveness is seen as one facet of their monstrous nature.

The image of the vampire as the consumer then is not limited to Claudia, and in *Interview with the Vampire*, the consumption of blood is very closely mixed with the consumption of material wealth. The vampiric skill set is utilized in acquiring wealth from unsuspecting victims (*IV* 44):

> And so [Lestat] could acquire cash at any moment and I could invest it. If he were not picking the pocket of a dead man in an alley, he was at the greatest gambling tables in the richest salons of the city, using his vampire keenness to suck gold and dollars and deeds of property from young planters' sons who found him deceptive in his friendship and alluring in his charm. But this had never given him the life he wanted, and so for that he had ushered me into the preternatural world that he might acquire an investor and manager for whom these skills of mortal life became most valuable in this life after.

Louis's and Lestat's relationship is described in terms of market relations. Louis's role as the manager of Lestat's wealth is integral for the continuing good fortunes of Lestat. Louis explains that in the world of exotic peoples and opulence, drinking imported wines, buying silver, gems and gowns, the vampire, "richly dressed and gracefully walking" in New Orleans does not attract attention any more than the rest of society (*IV* 45–6). Society is very much described as driven by

consumerist enterprise in different forms, and the vampire as the epitome of this finds his place and melds in with the populace undetected, as was seen in the case of Louis and Claudia in Paris.

In *The Queen of the Damned*, accumulation of wealth is also seen as essential for the "life" of a vampire. Regarding the vampire Armand, it is noted that for him to "enter" the twentieth century, which he had now understood enough about, the amassing of capital was necessary (*QT* 88–89): "He wanted 'incalculable' wealth. He wanted a vast dwelling full of all those things he'd come to value. And yachts, planes, cars – millions of dollars". The essence of the late twentieth century for Armand is seemingly distilled into the hunt for riches, which is later achieved through a literal treasure hunt across the globe, again utilizing vampiric powers in order to, for example, salvage gold from sunken ships.

The accumulation of all this wealth is culminated in the construction of the Night Island, a mecca for tourists and consumers (*QT* 91):

> You could buy anything on the Night Island – diamonds, a Coca-Cola, books, pianos, parrots, designer fashions, porcelain dolls. All the fine cuisines of the world awaited you. Five films played nightly in the cinemas. Here was English tweed and Spanish leather, Indian silk, Chinese carpets, sterling silver, ice-cream cones or cotton candy, bone china, and Italian shoes.

Along with every other product on the markets of the Night Island, it is telling that along with diamonds and designer fashions there is also included the ultimate symbol of the reach of global capitalism, Coca-Cola.

It is to be noted that the vampire's entrance into society or life as a vampire in general revolves around and starts with the accumulation of capital, as exemplified in Armand's treasure hunt, or the Night Island's opulent displays of wealth with the paintings by the Renaissance masters along with Persian carpets (*QT* 92). The vampire's existence seems inextricably connected with the lifestyle of the rich and famous. The beginning of Lestat's vampiric life begins with his creator Magnus instructing him to utilize a literal treasure in his lair (*VL* 94). He further notes that in this

treasure chamber lies everything in order for Lestat to prosper (*VL* 96), indicating that the concept of a poor vampire is a foreign one in this particular mythology of vampires. Lestat, instructing vampires establishing a new coven also tells them to acquire wealth from their victims in order to construct a sanctuary for themselves (*VL* 244). A prosperous vampire is sustained by blood and wealth, both playing no small part.

For the vampire characters then, wealth is essential. This is also explored in the mortal character of Daniel, who in the end becomes the progeny of the vampire Armand. The relationship between the two is described as that of lovers, but there is also an emphasis on the exchange of money, similarly to Lestat and Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*. Armand is seen as the provider figure in charge of Daniel's wealth, accumulated through the royalties of selling Lestat's autobiographical book, *The Vampire Lestat*. By contacting Armand on the Night Island, a private jet would come pick Daniel up and transport him there. Even with Daniel's net worth supposedly in the millions, Armand is seen as the keeper of his money (*QT* 68–9).

Furthermore, the exquisite wealth is seen as one of the main attractors in the relationship (*QT* 70):

> Six months had passed since [Daniel] had left the Night Island, and this time it was supposed to be for good. He had once and for all forsworn the world of carpets and limousines and private planes, of liquor closets stocked with rare vintages and dressing rooms full of exquisitely cut clothing, of the quiet overwhelming presence of his immortal lover who gave him every earthly possession he could want.

It seems then that aside from the “Dark Gift” of immortality, the most important thing a vampire can offer for a mortal is the gift of everlasting wealth. It is worth noting that in Daniel's speech, wealth is equated with the morally questionable choice of receiving immortality. This is similar to Lestat at first forswearing, or renouncing the immortality offered to him (*VL* 90). Enjoying the accumulated wealth or choosing to become one of the undead and hunting the living are implied both to be morally reprehensible choices, choices which the characters ultimately however make.

Daniel returns to Armand and is eventually also given immortality (*QT* 105). For as Daniel notes, mortality is felt more keenly among riches, for he was “desperate to possess all of this forever” (*QT* 91). Immortality is then framed as a way to hold on to one's acquisitions forever, further evidencing the inextricable bond of vampire and wealth.

4.2 Capitalist Society

As mentioned, society in the novels is often viewed through the lens of capitalism. In *The Queen of the Damned*, the relative affluence of society is described in detail, evidencing this focus on the role of capitalism (*QT* 187):

> . . . nothing equaled the flawless surface of this over-populated place, even to the San Francisco peasantry, whose tiny stucco cottages were choked with luxuries of every description. Driveways here were jammed with handsome automobiles. Paupers drew their money from bank machines with magic plastic cards. No slums anywhere. Great towers the city had, and fabulous hostelries; mansions in profusion; yet girded as it was by sea and mountains and the glittering waters of the Bay, it seemed not so much a capital as a resort, an escape from the world's greater pain and ugliness.

The description can not be seen as purely celebrating the relative affluence of everyone, but rather as also acknowledging the problems of over-population and also the overabundance of goods which lead to houses being “choked” with luxuries, a decidedly negative connotation. Moreover, the city is described as a resort, which alludes to it being not an actual place for habitation, but rather as a place of impermanence, a getaway dependent on its visitors, at the same time drawing focus on the circuit of capital needed for such resorts to function. Comparisons can also be drawn with Armand's Night Island, with the implication that the whole of society has turned into a hub for capitalism.

The relative affluence prevailing in society is also commented on in *The Vampire Lestat*. Department stores are described by Lestat as “palaces of near Oriental loveliness”, ordinary household items such as shampoo gleam on “sparkling glass shelves” like gems (*VL* 8). The rise of the middle class is also noted (*VL* 8)*:* “Waitresses drove sleek leather-lined automobiles to work.

Dock laborers went home at night to swim in their heated backyard pools. Charwomen and plumbers changed at the end of the day into exquisitely cut manufactured clothes". In Lestat's words, "all people had a right to love and to luxury and to graceful things" (*VL* 8). What could have been once considered as luxurious is available now for the masses through the rapid growth of the middle class.

The emphasis on wealth is exemplified in Lestat's description of the worst-off (*VL* 8): "Even the drunkards and lunatics who slept on the park benches and in the bus stations had meat to eat regularly, and even radios to listen to, and clothes that were washed". Despite the wealth at the disposal of the masses, social problems are seen by Lestat as resolved by there being radios, meat and clean clothes even for the poor, instead of housing or healthcare. The rise of capitalism has not necessarily brought well-being, but just the abundance of material possessions. As mentioned earlier, the effects of capitalism help hide from "the world's greater pain and ugliness" (*QT* 187).

In conclusion, the circuit of capital and its effects are explored in both the lives of the vampire characters and their exploits, but also described in society at large. As can be seen in these descriptions, the vampires and their acquisitiveness is not uniquely their property, but a part of a larger drive in the mentality of common, mortal people of the age. Capitalism as the impetus of postmodern power circulating in society is at the forefront of *The Vampire Chronicles*, for it is in every turn connected to the actions of the vampire characters. Furthermore, due to the vampire's predatory nature, depictions of vampiric glamour attained through consumerism inherently contain negative connotations.

4.3 Nihilism and the Fall of Grand Narratives

If one defines nihilism as a rejection of beliefs, authority and institutions (Lane 2000, 125), nihilism can be seen as prevalent in the "life" of a vampire. This is because of the fact that their nocturnal living and habits do not fit within the confines of society, and so they live apart from it. Thus, the

transformation into a vampire in itself can be seen as the first sign of the vampire's inherent nihilistic impulse.

The issue of nihilism is dealt with in *Interview with the Vampire* quite explicitly: by transforming into vampires, the protagonists of the novel opt out of society thoroughly, for they exit the world of the living, and thus also the institutions and ideologies inherent in society, bypassing whatever authority might have influenced them in life. In the *Interview with the Vampire* the church is at the forefront of this rejection. The most fearsome, religious weapons against the vampires of traditional gothic fiction are useless against the vampires depicted in *Interview with the Vampire* (*IV* 27): "'Oh, the rumor about crosses!' . . . 'Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular'". In this passage is embodied concisely and implicitly the rejection of religious values. Postmodern nihilism in *The Vampire Chronicles* can be explored in an interesting fashion, as vampires gain a unique view of human life through the prism of immortality. Because they are unable to die, faith becomes a matter of internal intellectual debate, rather than a necessity arising from a fear of impending and inevitable death for the individual.

After his transformation into a vampire, there are further signs of the nihilistic drive manifested in Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*. After the death of his brother, he is disillusioned with most everything and he "lived like a man who wanted to die but who had no courage to do it himself" (*IV* 14). As Louis walks inside a cathedral in Paris, he remarks (*IV* 158): "God did not live in this church; these statues gave an image to nothingness". As Louis rejects the belief in God, he also rejects the institution of the church. This rejection is rather concretely presented when he kills a priest at the steps to the Communion rail (*IV* 162). Louis thus rejects both faith and its earthly arbiter.

As can be seen later in the novel, surrendering to this sense of abandon is an inner conflict for Louis, and *Interview with the Vampire* is very much an exploration of this struggle. As he

remarks (*IV* 177): ". . . neither heaven nor hell seemed more than a tormenting fancy. To know, to believe, in one or the other . . . that was perhaps the only salvation for which I could dream". Even after rejecting God and welcoming nihilism, Louis holds onto the hope that he might embrace his faith in something, anything. On his way to the Old World, Louis ponders this matter (*IV* 177):

> It seemed at moments, when I sat alone in the dark stateroom, that the sky had come down to meet the sea, and that some great gulf miraculously closed forever. But who was to make this revelation when the sky and sea became indistinguishable and neither any longer was chaos? God? Or Satan? It struck me suddenly what consolation it would be to know Satan, to look upon his face, no matter how terrible that countenance was, to know that I belonged to him totally, and thus put to rest forever the torment of this ignorance. To step through some veil that would forever separate me from all that I called human nature.

As the passage exemplifies, Louis evidences a struggle to separate himself from a grand narrative espoused by Christianity. Even with this impulse there is still, however, a desire for some kind of overarching narrative to explain the world, even if it is its complete opposite. As Louis remarks, "[p]eople who cease to believe in God or goodness altogether still believe in the devil. . . . Evil is always possible, and goodness is eternally difficult" (*IV* 16). In this respect, *Interview with the Vampire* walks the line between conservative and progressive ideologies, for the option of rejecting the Christian grand narrative is not described in entirely neutral or positive terms, but rather as a bargain in which the other option in itself is not desirable, for it entails evil. Nevertheless, even with this note of caution, the choice of Louis is ultimately to reject the conservative ideals and moral valuations of Christianity, a choice further elucidated in the later novels through Lestat.

As seen before, the grand narrative most often depicted in the novels is that of Christianity, and the nihilism is thus projected onto religion. In the *Interview with the Vampire*, the universal questions regarding knowledge are also sought from vampire lore. However, the books containing accounts of vampires from eastern Europe are described as having "become for [Claudia] a sort of Bible" (*IV* 180), implying vampire lore's role to be functioning similarly to Christianity's grand narrative. As noted, the answers Louis and Claudia hope to find are not divorced from a Christian

framework (*IV* 182–3):

> And my heart beat faster for the mountains of eastern Europe, finally, beat faster for the one hope that somewhere we might find in that primitive countryside the answer to why under God this suffering was allowed to exist – why under God it was allowed to begin, and how under God it might be ended.

Louis's own private questions of existence are even more explicitly tied to Christianity (*IV* 158–9):

> *I* was the supernatural in this cathedral. I was the only supermortal thing that stood conscious under this roof! Loneliness. Loneliness to the point of madness. The cathedral crumbled in my vision; the saints listed and fell. Rats ate the Holy Eucharist and nested on the sills.

In *The Vampire Lestat* the themes of nihilism and the rejection of grand of narratives are also explored through the coven of Paris, established by the vampire Armand. Lestat, when arriving in Paris, encounters a flock of vampires living under the graveyard of Les Innocents. The vampire coven's actions are in stark contrast with Lestat, for they do not move among mortals unless to feed, and exhibit the traits familiar to classical vampire fiction, such as the inability to enter a church, a taboo which is proved false in *Interview with the Vampire*. As Lestat questions them (*VL* 213): "'What are you meant to be?' I demanded. 'The images of chain-rattling ghosts who haunt cemeteries and ancient castles?'". It can be inferred that this particular coven is still in the thralls of a grand narrative.

The coven is described as operating similarly to a church, but instead of following God, the vampires follow "Dark Ways" with Satan as their leader (*VL* 213). It is further noted that these Dark Ways were established because of a vision that a vampire named Santino had had in 1349, to "be as the Black Death itself, a vexation without explanation, to cause man to doubt the mercy and intervention of God" (*VL* 301). The first coven to follow this religious form of vampiric life was formed in the "shadow of the Roman Church" (*VL* 301). This coven also laid out five commandments that all vampires should obey (*VL* 301–2). Because of Armand's knowledge of their

rites, the “Dark Blessings” and “Dark Rituals” for the “Children of Darkness”, he became a “missionary” in order to form other covens all around Europe (*VL* 303). The system of belief is then not Christian in itself, but it nevertheless operates in very much the same framework and with the same thematic.

In the first interaction between Lestat, Gabrielle and the Children of Darkness, Lestat attacks the belief system as “nonsensical” and “contradictory”, and the vampires living “in the grip of the superstitions of the past” (*VL* 222). Lestat is trying to make Armand understand that their particular grand narrative is outdated in a world dominated by secularism and reason (*VL* 227–8). Regarding the rise of secularism and the diminishing sanctity afforded to ancestors in graveyards, Lestat remarks (*VL* 228):

> The people of Paris don't want the stench of graveyards around them anymore. The emblems of the dead don't matter to them as they matter to you. Within a few years, markets, streets, and houses will cover this spot. Commerce. Practicality. This is the eighteenth-century world.” . . .
>
> “Dont you see?” I said softly. “It is a new age. It requires a new evil. And I *am* that new evil.” I paused, watching him. “I am the vampire for these times.”

The grand narratives of old are in Lestat's view dead, and he elevates himself beyond good and evil, a grand narrative unto himself.

It is clear from Armand's remarks that the Dark Ways had been a protection for him and his flock (*VL* 225): “It is finished for my children. . . . [T]hey can disregard all of it. The things that bound us together, gave us the strength to endure as damned things! The mysteries that protected us here”. The communal values of the coven are in the end shattered by Lestat, replaced by the new evil, the character of the rebel against authority. As Lestat remarks to Armand (*VL* 308): “'I've been a rebel always,' I said. 'You've been the slave of everything that ever claimed you'”. In Lestat's exhortations is evident a drive to cast away the enslavement of a belief system of any kind, and to place trust in the individual subject instead.

The Vampire Lestat also describes a literal rejection of gods and furthermore a frustration

with their indifference, ultimately leading to nihilism. In the novel's vampire lore the first vampires were a king and a queen from Egypt, Enkil and Akasha, transformed into vampires by a malevolent spirit, and later mythologized into god figures to be preserved, and appropriately named *Those Who Must Be Kept*, or Mother and Father.

In the image of Akasha, now as the living statue, the thematic of the dead God is often evoked in the novel. There is also however a hope that the seemingly dead God might be alive in her tomb. As Marius, the caretaker of Akasha and Enkil notes (*QT* 245):

> Then, when I saw her standing there in the shrine, I knew that all my deepest hopes and dreams had come true! She was alive inside that body. Alive, while I played the acolyte, the slave, the eternal guardian of the tomb!

Other vampires note Akasha's death-like state of thousands of years (*QT* 264): "'What right have you to condemn my worship,' [Azim] cried, pointing his finger at [Akasha and Lestat], 'you who have sat silent on your throne since the beginning of time!'". In both Marius and Azim, there is evident a resentment of the fact that Akasha has in effect deceived her worshipers by staying silent for millennia. The image of indifferent gods is described as a source of great anxiety (*VL* 454): "And you cannot know what it means to keep them, to look at them year after year, decade after decade, century after century, and know that they could speak, they could move, and they will not!'".

In *The Vampire Lestat*, the passivity of Those Who Must Be Kept is associated with nihilism, evidenced in Marius's questioning of his existence (*VL* 433–4): "'Why should I do anything? If the Mother and Father will not rise from the sands to save themselves as the sun comes over the horizon, why should I move? Or speak? Or go on?' . . . [T]he Father and the Mother do not care for their children". The symbolic gods of the vampires are as good as dead, leading to existential angst and nihilism.

The origins of Akasha and Enkil are explained as being nothing more than an accident

thousands of years ago, “enclosed in magic and religion ever since” (*VL* 431). As Marius the keeper shows Lestat, Akasha and Enkil are preserved in a chapel resembling a church (*VL* 386): “I could almost hear hymns in this place. I could hear chants and ancient invocations. And I was no longer afraid. The beauty was too soothing, too grand”. This depiction is reminiscent of the solace the Paris coven sought from their Dark Ways. Furthermore, the immovable gods are indistinguishable from marble saints in churches, Lestat actually mistaking them for statues (*VL* 387). In a very literal manner the gods have become silent and dead, and what is left is the symbolism and the soothing effect in the form of a vampiric liturgy. Occasionally Those Who Must Be Kept are offered gifts in the form of mortals to feast on, a ritual which however happens out of sight, leaving only the victim as evidence, and the image of dead gods unchanged (*VL* 391).

The Vampire Lestat explores thoroughly the condition of living in a godless society through Lestat's search for answers through Marius. As is made clear, the creation of the first vampires is merely an accident, and even though Marius is willing to tell all he knows about their origins, he warns that “when I have given all I have to give, you will be exactly where you were before: an immortal being who must find his own reasons to exist” (*VL* 379–380). The implication in this pronouncement makes evident that there is no basis in a system of belief to help guide one's life amidst the crumbling of grand narratives, and Akasha and Enkil are of no help in this regard.

The philosophical back and forth between Marius and Lestat brings to mind the Nietzschean philosophy of the active man, confident in his being and more confident in the rejection of the slave-morality and its main perpetrator, religion. As Marius notes of Lestat (*VL* 381): “You're guilty of killing mortals because you've been made into something that feeds on blood and death, but you're not guilty of lying, of creating dark and evil systems of thought within yourself”. As they continue (*VL* 381):

> “To be godless is probably the first step to innocence,” he said, “to lose the sense of sin and subordination, the false grief for things supposed to be lost.”
>
> “So by innocence you mean not an absence of experience, but an absence of

> illusions."
>
> "An absence of need for illusions," he said. "A love of and respect for what is right before your eyes."

To live with the framework of religion and the accompanying metaphysical assumptions is seen as an error, an illusion to be discarded in favor of the actual, the real.

In *The Vampire Chronicles*, the question of nihilism is approached through the exploration of knowledge and illusion, as exemplified by the mythologized "gods" in Those Who Must Be Kept. The connection between Those Who Must Be Kept and grand narratives is explored further through the mythology presented in *The Queen of the Damned.* The title refers to Akasha, a queen from the area later known as Egypt, who became the first of the vampires, and acts as the starting point for the mythology and worship of the aforementioned "vampire religion". In *The Queen of the Damned*, Akasha can be seen as the harbinger of her own grand narrative she hopes to impose on the world, and is subsequently also cast as the villain. In this respect, *The Queen of the Damned* deals with the culmination of the nihilistic strand begun in *Interview with the Vampire*, brought to its conclusion.

One of the first encounters with Akasha in *The Queen of the Damned* sees Akasha described as white and statue-like, "like the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Catholic church" (*QT* 54). The description evokes Akasha's mission that becomes the central conflict in *The Queen of the Damned*, which is to rid the world of "famine and deprivation and ceaseless violence" (*QT* 236) through a plan that is later revealed as the mass killing of nearly every human male on the planet. Akasha however frames her actions inside a religious, and more specifically a Christian thematic (*QT* 235–6):

> Don't you see? There has been a design to all of it – your coming, my waking. For now the hopes of the millennia can be realized at last. Look on the little town below, and on this ruined castle. This could be Bethlehem, my prince, my savior. And together we shall realize all the world's most enduring dreams."

As is mentioned before, Akasha intends to "make the myths of the world real" (*QT* 240), which can

be construed in the thematic of postmodernity as reclaiming the grand narrative of religion, and imposing it on the population of the world. With the help of Lestat, Akasha intends to make “all the religions of the world... to sing [of them]” (*QT* 239). In this respect, Akasha is at odds with the rest of the vampires and their ideology, as evidenced in the underlying nihilism of many.

In the telling of the origin of Akasha, there is a sequence in which her creation of a grand narrative to explain the world to her is outlined. In the internal mythos of *The Vampire Chronicles*, the existence of spirits is real, and these spirits are what ultimately turn Akasha into the first vampire. Akasha, however, pursues knowledge of the afterlife and the gods of Egypt, and seeks answers from witches controlling the spirits, answers which do not satisfy her (*QT* 308):

> But it was too late. Something had happened to the Queen which was irrevocable. She had seen two pieces of evidence as to the power of the spirits, and she had heard truth and nonsense, neither of which could compare to the beauty of the mythology of her gods which she had always forced herself to believe in. Yet the spirits were destroying her fragile faith. How would she ever escape the dark skepticism in her own soul if these demonstrations continued?

It is then mentioned that “all the illusions of this woman lay now in complete ruin”, and “then her mind began to work, to do what it had always done – find some grand system to explain away what caused pain; some grand way to accommodate what she saw before her” (*QT* 308–9). The novel follows the queen's internal logic which presents a case of an individual confronting a threat to her worldview, and protecting it by constructing an explanatory grand narrative.

In general, the central conflict culminated in *The Queen of the Damned* can be described in terms of progress versus conservatism. Tellingly, faced with trusting in an old prophecy that foretells of a victory over Akasha, the vampires on the opposing side ask themselves (*QT* 348): “What can prophecy mean now . . . ? . . . Do we fall into the same errors that ensnare the Mother? The past may instruct us. But it won't save us”. In this is evident the progressive tenor in the novel's protagonists. However, Akasha's reaction is not to succumb to a new world view, but rather as mentioned before, to construct a grand narrative around the cult of the blood drinkers. At its core,

The Queen of the Damned is an exploration of the relationship between the comforting effect of the grand narrative of religion and of old myths, and its opposing progressive forces driven by nihilistic impulses.

The general view of religion in *The Queen of the Damned* is negative, evident in Akasha's depiction as the tyrannical villain. Furthermore, of Akasha's cult it is mentioned that “they took upon themselves the identity of Osiris and Isis, and darkened those old myths to suit themselves” (*QT* 380). Religion in this respect is equated into the selfish goals of its founders, instead of being treated as the result of genuine revelation. Lestat and Akasha are portrayed by the latter to their followers as “the miracle . . . the Mother and her Angel”, eliciting condemnation from Lestat (*QT* 278): “Akasha, this is a lie, a terrible lie. And the evil sown here will flourish for a century”. Religion is in no uncertain terms treated as a metaphorical seed of evil.

Ultimately then, the conflict in *The Queen of the Damned* stems from Akasha's intention of creating “a new religion, a new revelation, a new wave of superstition and sacrifice and death” (*QT* 408). The queen's motivation stems from despair, and the desire to “make meaning” through religion purely because there is none (*QT* 300). It is mentioned that Akasha has “no true morality, no true system of ethics to govern the things which she did” (*QT* 300), further underlining the Nietzschean theme that sovereign individuals and not the reactive forces of religion should be responsible in the valuation of moral matters.

As can be seen, the broad thematic in *The Vampire Chronicles* espouses the viewpoint of nihilism in regards to a grand narrative of religion, and this thematic is brought to a conclusion with Akasha in *The Queen of the Damned*. The overall depiction of religion is negative, and the underlying ontological base for the world of *The Vampire Chronicles* is constructed in a realist manner. Regarding the existence of spirits, the vampire Maharet suspects them to have “a scientific nature”, and that they are “no more magical than electricity or radio waves, or quarks or atoms, or voices over the telephone–the things that seemed supernatural only two hundred years ago” (*QT*

280–1). In this respect, the novels continue to embody the postmodern ethos.

4.4 Individualism in the Void of Values

One term that could be used to summarize the driving force behind the postmodern vampire is individualism, which can be seen as interwoven with the issue of nihilism. The myriad vampire characters through their very nature all exhibit and strive towards a form of individualism in elevating themselves above the spell of grand narratives. The hard individualism of the vampire character is manifested in their very nature, an issue explored in *Interview with the Vampire* (*IV* 92): “'Vampires are killers,' he said now. 'Predators. Whose all-seeing eyes were meant to give them detachment. The ability to see a human life in its entirety, not with any mawkish sorrow but with a thrilling satisfaction in being the end of that life, in having a hand in the divine plan'”. This statement cuts through to the essence of the vampire as elevated above normal human herds, with the vampire being in itself the prime mover of his existence. The vampire, capable of the same influence as God is then also the originator of values, ascending to God's place.

In *The Vampire Chronicles* there is also evident a strand of individualism that displays it as the outgrowth of a drive away from the values of community. As noted in the theory section, this is a typical characteristic of the postmodern impulse of individualism. The individualism in the rejection of religion and community by the vampire characters will be examined in this section.

The character of Lestat in *Interview with the Vampire* is described as displaying such individualism, as he clearly sees his vampirism as a gift that he must relish at the expense of others, manifested in the detachment from the community. To his dying father he yells (*IV* 42): “Why don't you die and leave me and my bankroll in peace!'”. In Lestat the strong dislike of his father can be construed as forsaking the semblance of a family unit in favor of individual ambitions. This drive is further manifested in Lestat seeing Louis only as an instrument that enables him to live in the plantation in relative affluence (*IV* 37), and to enjoy material pleasures instead of the emotional

support gained from communal values.

An individualistic mindset can be detected in Louis as well, as in the novel he refused to entertain the notion that his brother could have been having religious visions, embodying individualism as a threat not only to communal values, but also the values provided by a grand narrative of religion. As Louis remarks (*IV* 16): “But to stand in the presence of a saint . . . To believe that the saint has seen a vision. No, it's egotism, our refusal to believe it could occur in our midst”. As his refusal to believe in his brother's religious visions set in motion the chain of events that killed the brother and led to Louis choosing vampirism, his egotism could be seen as the cause of this development. In this respect, individualism is tied both to the rejection of the community and the religious values provided by it.

Interview with the Vampire lays out its own vision of a world in which egotistic individualism can be construed as an attack on religious values. This becomes evident when it is revealed that not even a priest is convinced that Louis's brother had seen visions. This can be construed as an example of individualism encroaching upon the territory of the church and religion, enforcing the notion that Louis is, ironically, not alone in his drive towards greater individualism, and not even the institution of church is free from this development.

As noted in section 3.7, individualism should not be expressly written off as 'bad' in itself, that is, linked with egotism or narcissism. However, as is evident in *Interview with the Vampire*, there is a certain sense of wariness when the novel considers the notion of individualism, for the tragic consequences are caused by people “choosing vampirism”, and in extension an ultimate culmination of individualism. Vampirism as perhaps the most extreme form of individualism is volatile, to say the least, for it involves not only a person constructing his own, often radical sense of morality, but also doing so at the expense of others, mainly their victims. Louis also leaves behind what is left of his family, and rejects the role that is naturally ascribed to him as the provider, and this byproduct of individualism is also manifested in Lestat's rejection of the family unit. These

developments echo Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's formulation of the aforementioned turn to morality in which value propositions are not dictated by the community (2002, 4), for in the drive towards greater individualism the subject has turned inwards.

In *Interview with the Vampire* and in postmodernity in general, individualism is an issue dovetailing nihilism, for as was mentioned in regard to the postmodern individual's confusion regarding moral choices, a grand narrative or a social group does no longer offer the choice of ready-made values for one's choosing. In the novel this is reflected in Armand's exclamation to Louis (*IV* 258):

> Children of Satan! Children of God! Is this the only question you bring to me, is this the only power that obsesses you, so that you must make us gods and devils yourself when the only power that exists is inside ourselves? How could you believe in these old fantastical lies, these myths, these emblems of the supernatural?'

One can read in Armand's monologue the admonishment of *any* grand narratives, opting instead in a way typical of postmodernity to place emphasis on the power of the individual instead of the solace and explanatory power provided by institutions of religion. As revealed later in *The Vampire Lestat*, this attitude originates from the protagonist Lestat, who convinces Armand's coven to disband and abandon the worship of the Dark Ways, the pseudo-Christian cult. In Lestat, however, this kind of elevation of the individual human spirit above a grand narrative is also hinted at in *Interview with the Vampire*, with Lestat replying to Louis's queries of God and Satan by exclaiming “I am the devil” (*IV* 42). Later, Louis compares Lestat's appeal to that of Christ with Louis himself being the disciple (*IV* 299), in part creating an image of Lestat as embodying the central place in the development towards greater individualism above any grand narrative. With the individual metaphorically taking the place of both the figures of God and the Devil, it is evident that the nihilistic impulse of rejecting religion is intertwined with promoting oneself as the originator of values, and thus also greater individualism.

The theme of individualism as a result of secularization and the abandonment of religious

values is further explored in *The Vampire Lestat*, as Marius remarks to Lestat (*VL* 382):

> "The common people of those days," he said, "still believed in religion, just as they do now. And for them it was custom, superstition, elemental magic, the use of ceremonies whose origins were lost in antiquity, just as it is today. But the world of those who *originated* ideas – those who ruled and advanced the course of history – was a godless and hopelessly sophisticated world like that of Europe in this day and age."

The division between the secular and the religious continues the theme begun in *Interview with the Vampire*. Moreover, in *The Vampire Lestat*, Marius's remarks echo more explicitly Nietzsche's philosophy of elevating humans above grand narratives. This becomes manifested in Marius's division between classes of people on the opposing sides of an ideological divide, a division not yet made explicit in *Interview with the Vampire*.

Throughout *The Vampire Chronicles*, the issue of reactive and active forces can be seen implicitly underlining the overarching plot, beginning with Louis's transformation from a reactive human – a man of God – into a vampire who has finally become a mirror image of Lestat. As mentioned before, the division is made explicit later by Marius. The vampires by their nature are manifestations of Prometheus, stealing fire from the gods in defiance (*VL* 89, 295); a figure reminiscent of the Overman. The affirmation of the power of this new, active man as an embodiment of an individual rising above the herd is evidenced in the novels with Lestat advising other vampires to "know your nature, kill, be what you are" (*IV* 121). At the heart of *Interview with the Vampire* is the question of accepting one's vampiric nature, a question explored through the internal conflict in Louis. As mentioned before, according to Nietzsche, there is a paralogism in expecting a force to separate itself from its effects, similarly as there is no return to mortality or morality for the vampires.

The death of God in the trilogy's conclusion is also literal and figurative, with Akasha as the head of the "vampire religion" vanquished, and her former follower in Marius extolling the freedom from worship (*QT* 430). *The Vampire Chronicles* convey the message of transcending the narcotic

effect of religion, and installs the superhuman vampire character as the prime individual capable of this transcendence.

Relevant to the analysis of *The Vampire Chronicles* is also to note the prominence of art and aesthetics that Nietzsche incorporates into his philosophy, for it further underlines the place of the vampire as transcending God as the image of the Overman, and thus also the extreme individualism. In the protagonist Lestat, aesthetics is an integral part of what could be described as the postmodern ethos regarding the world and morality. As he mentions in *The Vampire Lestat* (*VL* 143): "There was meaning in the world, yes, and laws and inevitability, but they had only to do with the aesthetic". This is further developed in *The Queen of the Damned* (*QT* 10):

> We live in a world of accidents finally, in which only aesthetic principles have a consistency of which we can be sure. Right and wrong we will struggle with forever, striving to create and maintain an ethical balance; but the shimmer of summer rain under the street lamps or the great flashing artillery against a night sky – such brutal beauty is beyond dispute.

"The world of accidents" in question implies a world without an underlying reason, which is lost through the death of God. Thus it is impossible to infer an ethically responsible choice from the world as it is, creating the need, similarly to Nietzsche, to look only to aesthetic principles to construct a meaning for guidance.

The seeds of this vision of conferring reason from aesthetics are also explored earlier in *Interview with the Vampire*, after Louis loses the last vestiges of his humanity with the death of Claudia. On his last night in Paris he tellingly goes to the Louvre in search of "some transcendent pleasure that would obliterate pain" (*IV* 344). However, the significance of art had changed for Louis (*IV* 344): "Before, all art had held for me the promise of a deeper understanding of the human heart. Now the human heart meant nothing". However, after this night, Louis travels the world for years in "pursuit of art" (*IV* 346), suggesting that art has not lost its meaning completely, but rather taken on a new one, divorced from the human heart. It is now functioning as something that provides a semblance of meaning for Louis as the image of the Overman, finally shedding his

mortal concerns and false notions of morality. This is a completion of the novel's overarching drive towards ultimate individualism.

4.5 Identity Construction and Individualism through Mass Media

Regarding identity construction and individualism in *The Vampire Lestat*, the background plot of the novel concerns Lestat joining a rock band called “Satan's Night Out” (*VL* 5). The rock band and the image of a vampire singer as its front man is eventually used as a cover for Lestat to appear openly in the world of humans and essentially hide in plain sight, much in the same way as in The Theatre of the Vampires. *The Vampire Lestat* explores individualism through the issue of identity construction through these performance acts in a mass medium. In addition, mass media in the novels is seen as intensifying the process of identity construction by offering models for the characters to emulate.

Lestat mentions the force which compelled him eventually to literally rise into the 20th century, and there is an emphasis on mass media in its different forms (*VL* 4):

> I'm referring here to the voices of radios, of course, and phonographs and later television machines. I heard the radios in the cars that passed in the streets of the old Garden District near the place where I lay. I heard the phonographs and TVs from the houses that surrounded mine.

It is noted that Lestat at first absorbs the voices, but later starts to “remember” what he is hearing, the entertainment programs, news broadcasts and the lyrics of popular songs (*VL* 4). Later the sounds of the 20th century produce an awakening in Lestat (*VL* 5):

> Then a self-consciousness developed in me. I realized I was no longer dreaming. I was thinking about what I heard. I was wide awake. I was lying in the ground and I was starved for living blood. I started to believe that maybe all the old wounds I'd sustained had been healed by now. Maybe my strength had come back.

Mass media can be seen as the constituting factor in helping develop a consciousness and thus an

identity in Lestat, resulting in his rebirth into the 20th century. The other component in this process is the power of rock music which had enchanted Lestat, “the way the singers could scream of good and evil, proclaim themselves angels or devils” (*VL* 5). In this depiction is evident the aforementioned elevation of the individual. Similarly in *The Queen of the Damned*, it is mentioned that “Lestat had used the distortions of media to disguise himself so perfectly as another mortal rock singer trying to appear a god” (*QT* 22). In the novels, through the depiction of vampires as performers it is made known that they can occupy subject positions in a very large spectrum, thus creating the possibility for them as individuals to craft a biography through imitating models from popular culture.

Vampires as the representations of postmodern individuals are intricately tied to the workings of mass media, and many of the characters besides Lestat seem to also be drawn in some way or another to especially television. Armand is described as “enthralled” by anything with blue skies, along with other television programming: “news programs, prime time series, documentaries, and finally every film, regardless of merit, ever taped” (*QT* 87). There are also other old vampires such as Pandora who are described as addicted to television, rarely moving away from the screen (*QT* 420), functioning as examples of the peculiar hold that television is described as having over the vampires. Of Khayman, a vampire thousands of years old it is mentioned how “[h]e also liked television – the entire electric process of it, with its tiny bits of light. How soothing was to have the company of television, the intimacy with so many artfully painted faces speaking to you in friendship from the glowing screen” (*QT* 109–110). The intimacy described reflects Richard Sennett's claim of TV functioning as an intimate, personal experience, amplified in the novel by the thousand year solitude of the receiver of the images. The image of Sennett's “passive witness” (1976, 283) is exemplified in the character of Khayman who finds a connection with the “painted faces” of people through television, while in reality this happens in complete isolation from not only the human race, but other vampires as well. Television is a functioning paradox in connecting to and

disconnecting from the world, creating a model of postmodern individualism as isolation from the community.

In *The Queen of the Damned*, the near mythical pair of the first vampires, Akasha and Enkil, are after thousands of years frozen as statues, and hidden away with their caretaker Marius to keep watch of their shrine. The novel in this setting rather interestingly intermingles religious imagery with the technology of the mass media, combining the images of a place of worship and the place of media consumption. As is mentioned of Marius's actions when trying to elicit a reaction from Those Who Must Be Kept (*QT* 21):

> Long ago, he'd set the satellite dish on the slope above the roof to bring them broadcasts all over the world. A tiny computer device changed the channel each hour. For years, they'd stared expressionless as the images and colors shifted before their lifeless eyes. Had there been the slightest flicker when they heard Lestat's voice, or saw their very own image? Or heard their own names sung as if in a hymn?
>
> Well, he would soon find out. He would play the video cassette for them. He would study their frozen, gleaming faces for something – anything – besides the mere reflection of the light.

Marius is responsible for a ritualistic maintenance which includes not only placing fresh coals and incense in a brazier, but also maintaining the television feed along with other electrical systems (*QT* 22), evoking the peculiar fusion of progress and myth. Similarly to Lestat, mass media is used in the hopes of producing an awakening in the consciousness of Akasha and Enkil, promoting the role of media in an almost literal identity construction.

Akasha and Enkil are described as the pinnacle of passive witnesses, as images from all over the world are beamed through to them with the help of satellite dishes and VCRs. Not only are the seemingly dead Gods serving as the image of the passive consumers of a stream of media, but the juxtaposition between worship and media consumption serves to elevate the latter into a pseudo-religious activity in itself, serving to promulgate postmodernity's ideology of an individualized identity that is introverted and passive with regard to the community.

4.6 The Narcissistic Vampire

As shown in the theory section 3.7, narcissism could be viewed as the byproduct of the larger, overarching drive towards greater individualism, and thus one of the symptoms of postmodernity. The image of a modern day Narcissus is first evoked in Lestat in *Interview with a Vampire*, when the plantation slaves begin to suspect that Lestat and Louis are in fact vampires. Adding to this crisis, Lestat's father is dying at the same time while Lestat himself is obsessively concentrated on filing his nails. As Lestat's father is taking his last breaths and begging for forgiveness from his son, Lestat merely "sat with his legs crossed, filing and filing, one eyebrow arched, his attention on his perfect nails" (*IV* 59). Possessed with his own image, Lestat is oblivious to everything around him, evidencing now a literal turning away from his family because of the narcissistic impulse.

In *The Queen of the Damned*, the theme of narcissism is very heavily underlined and developed in Lestat's enterprise of becoming a rock star (*QT* 4):

> The taste of mortal recognition was too seductive – the record albums in the windows, the fans leaping and clapping in front of the stage. Never mind that they didn't really believe I was a vampire; for that moment we were together. They were calling my name!

As an onlooker describes Lestat's stage performance in the novel (*QT* 203): "God, how he loved it! There was not the slightest pretense. He was bathed in the adoration he was receiving. He was soaking it up as if it were blood". Furthermore, in *The Vampire Lestat*, it is noted how Lestat describes the attention of Paris theatergoers as embraces while he is on stage (*VL* 67). The theme of performing and taking in the adoration of the crowd, evidencing narcissism, underlines the novels, and it is described as one the defining traits of the protagonist Lestat.

Narcissism resulting from a personality disorder is also underlined through the complicated relationship between Lestat and his mother, Gabrielle. She is described by Lestat as a self-absorbed person (*VL* 37):

> I was twenty and I couldn't read or write more than a few prayers and my name. I

> hated the sight of her books; I hated her absorption in them.
>
> And in some vague way, I hated the fact that only extreme pain in me could ever wring from her the slightest warmth or interest.

In this respect, Lestat's family configuration conforms to a one in which there is a “combination of parental coldness, extremely high expectations, and harsh demands”, leading to “the child's narcissistic self” (Horton, Bleau & Drwecki 2006, 351). It is also pointed out that narcissistic children “often occupy a pivotal point in their family structure, such as being the only child, or the only 'brilliant' child, or the one who is supposed to fulfill family aspirations” (Kernberg, quoted in Horton, Bleau & Drwecki 2006, 351). The emotional development of Lestat as revealed in the story of his origins follows closely the trajectory that Kernberg has outlined. As Lestat mentions (*VL* 35): “I alone put the fear of God into the servants or tenants by the time I was eighteen. I alone provided the food for us. And for some strange reason this gave me satisfaction”. Lestat occupies the aforementioned “pivotal point” in the family structure by very much being the provider for the family despite his young age.

Similarly, Lestat's mother is seen as fulfilling her aspirations through Lestat, which as mentioned is one of the outlined underlying causes behind the development into a narcissistic individual in a psychological framework. As Lestat describes her mother (*VL* 62):

> She said things I didn't understand then, about how when she would see me riding out to hunt, she felt some wondrous pleasure in it, and she felt that same pleasure when I angered everyone and thundered my questions at my father and brothers as to why we had to live the way we lived. She spoke in an almost eerie way of my being a secret part of her anatomy, of my being the organ for her which women do not really have.
>
> “You are the man in me,” she said.

Earlier in the novel it is revealed that Gabrielle has had thoughts of “lying there and taking [men] one after another, and feeling some magnificent triumph in it, some absolute release without a thought of what happens to your father or your brothers, whether they are alive or dead” (*VL* 39). Lestat also outlines his desire for vengeance against his father and brothers (*VL* 38), manifesting the

dynamic in which Lestat ultimately takes his mother's place in the rebellion against the males in the family.

Lestat's place in the family thus emphasizes one classic view of the development of narcissistic traits, marking him out as the archetypal narcissist. These underlying causes are in the end brought to a conclusion in Lestat's later narcissistic endeavors in performance art. With these developments combined, Lestat's character is one depiction of a narcissistic individual in the postmodern age.

4.7 Cynicism

Cynicism defined as the precursory disillusionment and distrust towards grand narratives is a theme explored in *The Vampire Lestat* through the vampire coven under the Les Innocents graveyard. They have formed their activity around a systematic worship in a cult-like setting. As mentioned before, the worship of the coven is in many instances likened to the actions of a church, and it functions as an authority, laying out edicts concerning certain actions by the vampires. As also mentioned, Lestat's aim is to disabuse the followers of their notions of there being a basis for such a worship, thus acting as the cynical voice against this system of belief, leading ultimately to its end. The opposing views become evident in the name under which the worship takes place, *Les Innocents*, evoking cynicism's counterpart of naivete and innocence. At the heart of *The Vampire Lestat* and to some degree *Interview with the Vampire*, there is a push and pull between cynicism and innocence. As was seen before, cynicism is also closely linked to nihilism. Both Lestat and Louis once put their faith in God, conferring at least a semblance of meaning into the world. The evolution of cynicism regarding that faith is a theme marking the first two novels especially.

Cynicism as a straightforward attack against the crumbling of grand narratives is presented in the *Interview with the Vampire* through Armand's micro-society of vampires living in the heart of Paris. Regarding the cynicism of the vampire actors in the Théâtre des Vampires, Armand remarks

to Louis (*IV* 310): “They reflect the age in cynicism which cannot comprehend the death of possibilities, fatuous sophisticated indulgence in the parody of the miraculous, decadence whose last refuge is self-ridicule, a mannered helplessness”. Armand's monologue seems aimed at characters depicted as embodying the onslaught of postmodern cynicism and the dashing of Enlightenment hopes of progress. As opposed to Louis, the actors' cynicism is an attack, denigrating and mocking human life, and a resigning in the face of the new world order, evident in their disregard for innocent human life through the act of killing (*IV* 242–3).

The vampire actors in *Interview with the Vampire* also represent Bewes's description of the postmodern cynics (1997, 26), discussed in section 3.2. The vampires of the theater are presented as the image of the detached and decadent postmodern elitists, marked partly by their high culture performance. There is also present the silent laugh of the vampire actors, for their performance fools the audience and leaves them in the dark regarding the true nature of the performers. As in Sloterdijk's definition of a cynic, the vampires in contrast with the innocent audience are decidedly in the know, smiling with “fatal cleverness” (1984, 191) as they succeed in their deception. Their performance and the entire concept of the theater hinges on the inherent irony of having vampires exist in plain sight, a sign of the aforementioned self-ridicule and of the cynic's secret knowledge that the rules of human morality do not apply to them.

The characters' reactions to cynicism are contrasted, on the one hand, in the vampire actors, and, on the other hand, in the moral compass of Louis who agonizes over his vampirism and his quest to find some reason for existence. Louis's quest in the novel is that of trying and ultimately failing to find worth in humanity, while Lestat's actions foreshadowed those of the vampire actors as he danced with the body of Claudia's mother, grotesquely mocking it (*IV* 83). Louis as the moral center of the narrative is at first set up as the victim of cynicism. As Armand contrasts Louis with the actors in the “age in cynicism” (*IV* 310): “You reflect your age differently. You reflect its broken heart”.

The novel, however, moves towards Louis ultimately losing the humanity he has had, and the gap between Louis and Lestat is closed when Louis transforms another human being into a vampire. As he remarks (*IV* 295): “What has died in this room tonight is the last vestige in me of what was human”. It is ultimately not the act of killing that conveys the finality of his transformation into a vampire, but the act of playing God in such a manner. By condemning another soul to eternal life and surpassing the power of God, Louis reaches the transcendence of the human spirit above the grand narrative, a persistent theme in the overarching plot of *The Vampire Chronicles*. With his transformation, Louis's suffering is ultimately now transformed into pure cynicism, as he is able to commit the act on another human being. As he notes (*IV* 345): “I sought for nothing in the great source of change which is humanity. . . . I was satisfied. I was filled to the brim”. As he later elaborates (*IV* 362): “. . . I sought for other vampires, for God, for the devil, for a hundred things under a hundred names. And it was all the same, all evil. And all wrong”. These statements make evident Louis's distrust of his former ontological positions, marking him as a staunch cynic, and ultimately a nihilist.

As mentioned in the theory section 3.2, cynicism as a postmodern phenomenon can be seen as confined to an urban landscape which can be seen as the vampires' playground in the novels. The vampires are seen as utilizing the vastness and diversity of cities to hide their figures and more importantly their activities, marking them as decidedly city-dwelling creatures. In *Interview with the Vampire* the dichotomy between the city and the countryside is developed through Louis's and Claudia's exploration of Central Europe in search of other vampires, as presented in the vampire lore that they have studied. As Louis remarks (*IV* 184): “Because these simple country people, who might have found the crowded streets of New Orleans terrifying, believed completely that the dead did walk and did drink the blood of the living. They knew our names: vampire, devil”. In the countryside, the vampire is markedly different from the “simple country people”, contrasted with the vampire blending in with the rest of society in a city-setting. As in Sloterdijk's formulation,

cynicism's roots are inside the city sphere (1984, 191), making it possible for people outside to believe in such supernatural creatures as vampires and the devil.

In *The Interview with the Vampire*, the dichotomy of urban versus rural is also mentioned in connection with Paris and New Orleans. In contrast with the former, “there was something forever savage and primitive” in New Orleans, “something that threatened the exotic and sophisticated life both from within and without” (*IV* 219). Furthermore there was a “fierce wilderness” just outside the city, “ready to engulf it” (*IV* 219). The description of savage nature outside the orderly city underlines the artificiality of the city, highlighting man's dominion over nature which is seen as threatening civilization. In this respect, not only is the city established as the de facto home of the vampiric cynic, but also the crowning achievement of man overcoming God's jurisdiction; the tower of Babel spreading out horizontally in cynical defiance.

4.8 Familial and Social Structures

The postmodern family unit is reflected in *Interview with the Vampire* in the relationship between Louis, Lestat and Claudia. Claudia is brought into the relationship by the actions of Lestat and Louis, and the addition of a childlike-figure completes the image of the family with two fathers. The novel describes Louis's and Lestat's relationship as beyond heterosexual norms (*IV* 22): “[Lestat's] movement [was] so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover”. The exchange of fluids is also described as overtly sexual (*IV* 23): “I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion. . . .” The trio could then be seen as echoing not only a structure of a family, but the model is decidedly of a permeable, postmodern nature.

It is worth noting that vampirism as a conduit in addressing the social structures of postmodernity adds new layers to the representation of these familial structures. Claudia's entrapment in the body of a child can be read as metaphorically and quite literally as fixed, for she

is physically unable to grow out of or change the child's physique which is thrust on her upon her transformation into a vampire. As was mentioned, the only way to rebel against this is by constructing an identity through commodity signs, the bracelets and rings of the adult, and the ownership of a home, from which can be inferred also the responsibilities of an adult.

Regarding this transformation, Louis remarks that Claudia has become more than just the orphan girl or the lost child (*IV* 223). The transformation is then not an accepted one, for as Claudia alludes to it, Louis seems to think of Claudia as forever a child. Similarly, Lestat's attempt to fashion Claudia into a “magnificent doll” can be interpreted as an attempt to set her into a traditional role in a patriarchal system (*IV* 110). As seen in the process of identity formation in the epoch of postmodernity, the identities are often formed against the dominant conventions of society. Not only does Claudia upend her role as a child, but the transformation into a vampire results in her becoming something to be feared as “wicked and shocking to the passers-by who succumbed to her” (*IV* 223). As the apparent moral compass of the story, Louis seems repulsed by both of these transformations. This mirrors in part the caution and disapproval evidenced in the conservative discourse of upended family relations, and the traditional roles associated with them.

The quest for identity and individualization is also outlined in Claudia's sexual liberation, which is implied in the novel as she mirrors herself in a sexualized doll (*IV* 224): “[H]er face went dark as again she played with the doll, her fingers pushing the tiny neckline down toward the china breasts. 'Yes, I resemble her baby dolls, I am her baby dolls”. Claudia asks Louis if he thought that she would be his daughter forever, and Louis averts his eyes (*IV* 225), further underlining the transformation from a metaphorical daughter to a lover and the apparent shame that Louis feels. He tries to inquire Claudia about this transformation from a daughter, a child, into something sexualized (*IV* 225): “'And what do they think of you,' I asked as gently as I could, 'out there?' I gestured to the open window. “'Many things.' She smiled. 'Many things. Men are marvellous at explanations. Have you seen the “little people” in the parks, the circuses, the freaks that men pay

money to laugh at?'", implying that men view Claudia as a small adult rather than a child. Claudia in turn inquires from Louis about the feeling of making love, which makes him ashamed even further (*IV* 225). The image of a sexualized Claudia as a woman in a child's body is clearly disturbing, and the feelings of Louis convey the conservative disapproval aimed at the sexual liberation and woman's expanded role in the social sphere. In Louis's view, Claudia's role should quite literally forever be that of the daughter's, and the realm of sexuality should be forever out of reach for her.

Claudia being forever trapped in the body of a child also brings to the family unit a representation which perhaps could not have been explained away in the earlier framework of family sentiment in modernity. As Elkind notes, in a postmodern society, "children have come to be seen as competent, ready and able to deal with all of life's vicissitudes" (1995). This new reality is evident in the fact that Claudia's mental development progresses, while her body is still that of a child. Claudia becomes an adult in a child's body, an offspring of the new, permeable postmodern family.

However, as Elkind notes (1995):

> This new perception of childhood competence does not grow out of any new revolutionary findings about child growth and development. It does derive from the inability of postmodern parents to protect their children in the way that modern parents were able to protect their offspring.

This inability of the parents is described explicitly, as Louis fails to protect Claudia from the Théâtre des Vampires and she is eventually made to burn in sunlight. The Parisian coven of vampires destroys Claudia because the creation of a child-vampire is seen as an affront to their rules. In the trio of Louis, Lestat and Claudia is thus reflected the microcosm of a postmodern society. The new family unit is depicted as a viable alternative to other models, but there are still forces trying at the same time to declare it as nonconformist.

As Candace R. Benefiel notes in her article "Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the

Nuclear Family in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*" (2004, 270):

> The family group of Interview with the Vampire, as well as subsequent iterations of the vampire family, allows the reader to explore issues of alternative family structures and incestuous attraction within the family, and to play out the consequences for good or ill of these imagined scenarios. The vampire, aloof from human considerations, nonetheless stands in for the reader. Whether the nuclear family, either in its distorted but disturbingly realistic portrayal in Interview with the Vampire or in a more prosaic setting, remains a viable mode of existence at the turn of the twenty-first century is a question that readers and viewers must answer for themselves.

In the novel, the examination of these new, postmodern familial structures is presented as inherently containing a tension between conservatism and progressive ideology, echoing similar cautious attitudes in the case of other representations of the postmodern epoch. However, as Benefiel notes, the ultimate judgment is reserved for the reader to hand out.

4.9 Incestuous Vampires and Homosexual Attraction

Incestuous attraction as mentioned by Benefiel (2004, 270) is a theme explored in both *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*, and in both novels the relationship explored is that of the mother and son, both figuratively and literally.

In the case of Lestat and her mother, Gabrielle, there is the inherent sexualization in their relationship through the mere act of taking and receiving blood, which as seen before is an act colored with sexual undertones. This is evident in Lestat's description of the act (*VL* 157):

> [S]he was flesh and blood and mother and lover and all things beneath the cruel pressure of my fingers and my lips, everything I had ever desired. I drove my teeth into her, feeling her stiffen and gasp, and I felt my mouth grow wide to catch the hot flood when it came.

In this initial description it is to be noted that the roles of mother and lover are already combined into one. However, Lestat appears to vacillate between seeing Gabrielle in these two roles, once describing her as "no mother anymore" (*VL* 158), and soon after that as "Mother", with a caveat

that it was said “like some stupid mortal” (*VL* 159). This hesitancy continues as evidence of an internal conflict in the face of this radically altered family dynamic. As Lestat continues (*VL* 160): “Gabrielle, that was the only name I could ever call her now”. This pronouncement is then again countered moments later (*VL* 168):

> And though I said her name over and over, to make it natural, she wasn't really Gabrielle yet to me. She was simply *she*, the one I had needed all of my life with all of my being. The only woman I had ever loved.

The incestuous undertones in the relationship are then not explicitly presented as viable, a fact made clear by Lestat's shifting views of her mother, and the distancing act of naming her *Gabrielle* instead of *Mother.* Despite the conflict presented, the transformation into a vampire gives a new freedom for the novel to explore the relationship despite the blood relation between the two characters.

In *The Queen of the Damned*, the relationship between Lestat and Akasha is described through the thematic of vampire mythology in which there is a depiction of the worship of the Great Mother and her son and lover, first introduced in *The Vampire Lestat* (*VL* 407). This myth is realized as Lestat and Akasha appear to villagers as “the Mother and her Angel” (*QT* 278). And as Lestat notes also (*QT* 437): “You know we were lovers, she and I, as surely as a mortal man and woman ever were”. The images of mother and lover are combined in Akasha, bringing with it the incestuous undertones.

As in the case of grand narratives, Akasha's role in the social relationships between the vampires, though figuratively incestuous, represents also the conservative, heterosexual alternative to a relationship between Lestat and Louis. As Lestat recounts him and Akasha being lovers as “a mortal man and woman ever were” (*QT* 437), the phrasing is evocative of the words uttered in the ceremony of the institutionalized form of male-female relationship: marriage. Then again, Akasha can be seen as countering the prevailing postmodern ideology manifested through the vampire

protagonists and presenting the conservative alternative to it.

It is worth noting that in *The Vampire Chronicles* in general, nearly every romantic relationship is homosexual, a theme carried on through all of the three novels analyzed in the thesis. In *Interview with the Vampire*, the main partners are Louis and Lestat, while in *The Vampire Lestat* the relationships revolve around Lestat and Nicolas, and further in the novel between Marius and his former lover Armand, and ultimately in the *Queen of the Damned* between Armand and Daniel. Even in the aforementioned relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle, Lestat's sexual fantasy of "ravaging" Gabrielle is triggered by Gabrielle becoming "the boy" through wearing a disguise, "her hair still full over her shoulders looking more the lion's mane now than the lovely mass of woman's tresses" (*VL* 171). In *The Vampire Chronicles*, the only relationships that are left romantically unfulfilled are those of the female characters, who are left without a pairing, thus attesting to the novels' emphasis on relationships outside the conservative, hetero-normative ideology.

5. Conclusion

In the thesis I have examined the first three novels of *The Vampire Chronicles*, and it can be seen that they all share themes constituting a postmodern ideology. However, not all the novels share all facets of these themes, but it is rather that postmodernity acts as an overarching, developing theme for the series.

Interview with the Vampire is the first introduction into the symptoms of postmodernity, and it largely examines the individual's reaction to them through the protagonist Louis. At the forefront is the struggle of accommodating into a life as a vampire, and the various consequences resulting from this. As shown, the struggle at first is mainly that of conserving a human morality and coming to terms with his elevation above mortals. As seen, in the forefront of this process is the ever growing cynicism which eventually bridges the gap between Louis and the protagonist of the later novels, Lestat.

The Vampire Lestat follows a similar trajectory with now Lestat coming to terms with vampirism, but the postmodern thematic does not provide a site for similar struggle, hints of which could be seen in Lestat's actions in *Interview with the Vampire*. In Lestat there does not exist the agony present in Louis, and from this can be inferred that the novels through Lestat's character embrace postmodernity as a viable ideology for the individual to follow. This is evident in the theme of nihilism which is developed further in *The Vampire Lestat*. Lestat does not share Louis's apocalyptic visions of churches crumbling, but is rather actively shown as undermining religious grand narratives.

In the *Queen of the Damned*, the themes are brought to a conclusion with the full introduction of Akasha, who functions as the embodiment of a religious grand narrative as well as in general the harbinger of conservative ideology. The culmination of the trilogy is in the battle which sees the protagonists pitted against Akasha and the religion she wishes to impose on the world. However, the underlying conflict is between differing ideologies, neither of which is inherently completely negative. On the one hand, Akasha decries the horrors of war, disease and the indifference of the rich in "technological citadels" as evidence of the "depravity and chaos" of the world (*QT* 402–3). As mentioned, her answer to this is to construct a new religion. On the other hand, Marius extols the "evolution of *the* human soul" as the hope for a better future (*QT* 403). The conflict is then between the elevation and the subjugation of the individual, a conflict ingrained in the interaction between postmodernity and its predecessors.

Ultimately the advance of this religion is halted, and the vampires remain as the arbiters of values in the resulting void. Cynicism can also be seen to act as the precursor to nihilism in the novels, continuing the aforementioned trajectory that moves towards greater acceptance of the postmodern episteme. Both *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat* deal with the shattered worldviews resulting from Louis's and Lestat's transformations into vampires. Cynicism is seen as evolving in both characters, as they both at first share a belief in God (*VL* 87, *IV* 11). In both

cases the ultimate conclusion is, however, manifested in the loss of that faith. Through the introduction of Akasha, the theme of rejecting a religious grand narrative becomes more explicit, concluding the ideological drive behind postmodernity.

As mentioned, the novels carry the thematic of postmodernity and ultimately move towards its acceptance. This becomes evident in the depiction of Lestat who moves from being a villainous character in *Interview with the Vampire* to becoming the (anti)hero of the later novels. It is worth noting that Lestat claims Louis to have been an unreliable narrator in *Interview with the Vampire* (*VL* 498–9). This change in Lestat from a villain to a protagonist serves to underline the embracing of postmodern ideology, as Louis is according to Lestat a “sufferer” and “the most beguilingly human fiend” (*VL* 498–9). As seen in the analysis, it is ultimately Lestat that is the embodiment of the postmodern individual, not inhibited by human concerns of morality.

It seems clear that the society of Rice's fiction is depicted as being dominated by the power of postmodern ideology, as the characters' actions can be seen as driven by postmodern themes outlined in the theory section. Despite its prevalence, in the novels there is always inherent a tension in regards to the question of embracing this postmodern ideology. One of the central tensions originates from the nature of the characters themselves, as the vampires consistently act against society's norms, be it through sexual taboos or the act of killing. Even the supposedly “human vampire” Louis is depicted as killing innocents (*IV* 162). *The Vampire Chronicles* portrays the vampire as a sympathetic monster, but a monster nonetheless. In this regard, it is left for the reader to interpret the moral viability of the vampires, and to accept or discard the episteme of postmodernity.

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